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"THE FORGET-ME-NOTS GROW HERE."

The Only Daughter; or, Brother against Lover.

BY ALICE FLEMING.

CHAPTER I.

A LONG SUMMER'S DAY.

THE sunlight glinted and shimmered on the river; the water sparkled like diamonds as it fell over the weir at Lockwood.

A merry party had assembled on the lawn of The Cedars, the residence of John Aitken, Esq., banker, of London and Lockwood.

A picnic party had been arranged a few days before, and Roselle Aitken, the pearl of the river, and only daughter of the local magnate, was to celebrate her eighteenth birthday on the banks of the stream she loved so well.

John Aitken was a widower; a hale, hearty man, full of business cares and anxieties. For many years his wife had been an invalid, and when she faded from his life his girl had taken her place.

His house was never lonely, for, besides Roselle, he had four stalwart boys, who assisted in the bank, and seemed to be always full of some new plan for enjoyment after business hours, or on the few holidays allowed to a busy city man.

Strange to say, the lads agreed together wonderfully well, but in nothing so much as devotion to their beautiful sister.

For Roselle was very lovely. She had chestnut hair, shaded with gold; eyes so blue they seemed at times to take a violet tinge; ripe red lips, and tiny pearly teeth.

Her life had been so happy, she had been so tenderly nurtured, smiles flitted over her features from pure joyousness of heart.

Her father literally worshiped her. To him she was all the world. No thought of home ever entered his mind but was connected with Roselle.

This summer day she stood among a merry group, the pet and darling of them all.

There were her brothers, Ralph and Ernest, Willy and Gustave, all in boating costume; her father, portly and handsome, laughing at his own little jokes between the puffs of his cheroot; and her childhood's companion, George Purcell, a fair-haired, frank-looking lad, who was so much like one of the family, he lived as much at Lockwood as he did at his mother's cottage at Richwell, three miles away.

Mrs. Purcell was a distant relative of the banker, and he had taken care that she had her little money well and profitably invested.

Moreover, he had so far provided for her fatherless boy that George was now a rising young fellow, shrewd and clever, with a very fair chance of a junior partnership in the firm with which he was connected.

Just now he was all-important. He knew the river from end to end, and to his judgment and experience all the guests deferred.

"You are to be prime minister, George," quoth Ralph, patting his friend on the shoulder. "Since I nearly drowned you all at Bernard Loch, I have become rather dubious respecting my boating."

Amid merry laughter and joyous excitement, the party started for their holiday.

The boat was rather heavily laden, but the rowers were young and strong; and soon the meadow was reached where luncheon was to be partaken of.

"Is it not lovely?" cried Roselle, enthusiastically. "Mr. Purcell, I must press you into my service. The forget-me-nots grow here by the margin of this little cutting. Will you gather me a bouquet?"

"Of course I will!" he answered. "Will you come with me, and point out those you like best?"

His voice faltered at the last, and Roselle's heart beat fast. There was a ring in his tones she had never heard before, and for the first time in her young life her thoughts were tinged with a tender remembrance.

"Yes," she faltered, "I will accompany you. Why not?"

"Why not, indeed?" he murmured. "Come then."

He offered his arm, and the two wandered off together.

Her father took the thing as a matter of course; so, also, did her brothers, who looked upon George as one of themselves, and never dreamed for a moment he thought of Roselle save as a sister.

Mr. Aitkin himself looked upon George Purcell as a promising young man, likely to make his way in the world; but had he been in a far superior position, the banker would have looked with extreme disfavor upon any pretensions to winning his young daughter.

In truth, she was so much a part of the household, such a ray of sunshine in her home, that father and brothers alike would have stood aghast at the notion of her leaving The Cedars, even though to wear a coronet.

So just now, at all events, George Purcell's prospects were any thing but brilliant. For years past he had loved Roselle in a certain fashion.

He had seen her loving and gentle, like a good fairy among those most dear to her, and his heart had gone out to her in the days long ago, when she was little more than a child.

Now the revelation had come to him, as it does to so many, suddenly. For the first time, a new, strange joy irradiated his counte-

nance; the love-light of a dearer life shone upon his path.

"Roselle," said Mr. Aitkin, "we are all tired and hungry. Our boys have been fishing, but have caught no fish. So much the better for us all," he chuckled, slyly.

Laughter and good cheer—these were the staple ingredients in the mirthful feast. The popping of champagne corks, the ripple of the dear old river, the rush of the water as it fell over the weir, were accompaniments exquisitely in keeping with our Roselle's eighteenth birthday.

All toasted her. Her health was drank with three times three and a little cheer in; and Ralph Aitkin never looked more brave and manly than when he responded to the toast on his sister's behalf.

He spoke as all young Englishmen do speak under such circumstances. In a few well-chosen words he expressed his thanks for the honor done to the fair maid; and when he concluded his speech, cheers, again and again renewed, greeted his effort.

George Purcell shook him by the hand, and laughed, though there was a suspicious moisture in his eyes.

Roselle was pretending to look at the landscape. There was a great lump in her throat. She longed to cry, and dared not. Her father held one of her hands, her youngest brother the other.

CHAPTER II.

"OVER THE WEIR."

The luncheon was eaten, the birthday song had been sung, as only a lover could sing it. George Purcell had a rich, deep tenor voice, and sung to Roselle as a bird would sing to his mate.

Roselle sat and talked, her pretty cheeks flushed, her eyes sparkling with delight.

"Come, George," said Ralph; "let us take the ladies round the point. The afternoon is getting on; and, by the time we return, 'Home sweet home,' will be the word."

"I am with you," returned George. "But, before we start, I must make a stipulation."

"What is that?" asked a chorus of voices.

"That we do not approach the weir too closely. I know the river well, and the late rains have poured in tons of water."

"There! that is just like George," cried Ralph. "He is always predicting storms and bad weather, no matter how bright the sun or blue the sky."

"George is right," said the banker; "the surface of the water is calm and smooth, but it may be very treacherous, notwithstanding."

Ralph felt irritated at his father's speech. George was the guide; he was to be the mentor; his words were to carry weight above all others.

Surely the eldest son, the hope of the house, should be consulted rather than a stranger.

The ladies, too, looked upon George as the promoter of all the enjoyments of the day; and Ralph began to feel jealous, and, consequently, miserable.

"I will take stroke oar," he said to George, rather brusquely. "I fancy I know the river as well as you do."

George started.

"What in the world is the matter, Ralph?" he asked. "Why, you generally wish me to be the pioneer on occasions like this."

"I do not to-day," retorted Ralph. "The ladies must have their way. They have expressed a wish to see the fall, and I intend indulging them so far."

He moved away as he spoke, and Roselle followed him.

"Dear brother," she whispered, "why did you speak so coldly to George? Oh, Ralph, it isn't like you!"

He bit his lip. Then he said, gently: "Nonsense! Do not trouble yourself about so small a matter. I fancied George Purcell was taking too much the position which should be occupied by your brother Ralph, that is all."

"All! Oh, how can you talk like that?"

Ralph, if one of you had to die, I think George would give his life for yours."

Ralph stared; and it flashed upon him in a moment—*Roselle loved George Purcell!*

When he spoke again it was in a voice choked with emotion.

"I do not care to discuss George Purcell's merits or demerits," he said. "Come, Roselle, the boat is ready. Give me your hand, dear—so—that is it!"

He handed her into the place of honor in the pretty skiff, and threw a blue shawl over her shoulders.

"Our boat is the fastest on the river," cried George, exultantly.

"And carries the Pearl," laughed Roselle's youngest brother.

"Sissy ought to be proud," said Ralph. "But she is not."

He bent to his oar as he spoke the last few words, and Roselle's heart beat painfully. She glanced at George, but he was rowing a steady stroke and did not perceive it.

"I am proud," said Roselle, at last. "Happy, very happy in your love, dears."

George glanced at Roselle gratefully.

"Dear heart!" he murmured.

Ralph relented a little at this.

"Roselle is fond of the water," he said at length. "She comes of a rowing family; that is the secret, I suppose?"

"Now for the reach," cried the ladies. "Pull to the left everybody."

The men laughed, and rested on their oars.

"We must be steady, and avoid the current," said George, quietly. "I saw a boat once rowed clean over the weir, and have not forgotten it yet."

"Ridiculous!" said Ralph. "Do you take us for idiots, George? With the strength in our craft, we could go to the very edge, and get away again."

"You could do nothing of the kind," retorted George. "Why, Ralph, what in the world is the matter with you to-day? We are as close to the fall as it is safe for us to go. Steer to the right—eh, Ralph?"

"No," cried Ralph; "keep her head where she is now, and the ladies can see the fall."

"We are drifting down," cried George.

"For Heaven's sake, Ralph, be careful!"

"All right," returned Ralph. "I know the river as well as you do, and I say it is perfectly safe."

"And I say it is not," cried George Purcell.

"The current sets in from the corner, and the tide rushes round the point at the rate of twenty miles an hour. Ralph, you must see we are too near the fall?"

"No, I do not," retorted Ralph. "See how calmly we float on the water."

"But we are gradually getting into danger, dear Ralph," said Roselle, gently. "I can feel the rocking of the boat, and I, for one, would prefer to see the fall from a distance."

"And I would not," interfered Ralph, gruffly. "There is no danger, I tell you."

"As you please, Ralph," said George. "If it were a matter concerning ourselves only, I would say nothing. I am thinking of the ladies."

"So am I!" returned Ralph, hotly. "Keep her head where she is now, and I will defy all the currents in the river to harm us."

The boat rocked to and fro on the water, drifting, ever drifting, toward the weir.

The surface of the water seemed a dead level; only the rippling wave told of the danger to be apprehended.

It was very pleasant to feel the rocking of the boat as it oscillated—now near, now further away, from the osier-lined shore.

"Are we not rather too near the corner?" asked Roselle, anxiously.

"I think we are," returned George, hastily.

"This is the most dangerous part of the whole river, as far as I know. Steer out a little, and let us cross. I don't like our course at all."

"I do," retorted Ralph, sulkily. "Keep the steering-lines just as they are."

"But, Ralph, dear, we are really out of our course. I am getting alarmed. The rowers don't move the boat a bit; and they are pulling hard, too."

"Nonsense!" said Ralph. "We are steering a direct course. The ladies wish to see the fall, and if we go over to the other side, they will not be able to do so."

"Ralph," suddenly cried Roselle, "see—the fall is close to us!"

Ralph, who was rowing stroke, looked behind him impatiently.

"Back water," he shouted, "for your lives!—back water hard!"

Amid the dash and roar of the water his voice was unheard.

Only his frantic action could have been seen and understood.

The boat seemed to glide round the point, and before a word could be uttered, canted over.

Then rose a shriek, heard far beyond the hissing and bubbling of the water as it fell among the timber.

The craft was dashed to pieces, splintered like match-wood. George Purcell was the only one who retained anything like presence of mind or self-command.

When the frail boat was dashed over, he threw off his boating-shoes and jacket and rushed to Roselle.

Amid the shrieking of the ladies, and the expostulations of the men, he caught her in his arms.

"Cling round my neck, Roselle," he cried, "and hold fast!"

She did so, and, with a mighty leap, George cleared the fall, and swam with his burden to the shore.

Meanwhile, the rest of the party were struggling in the water. Fortunately they were within sight and hearing of half a dozen parties in the lake below.

The lads could swim well enough, so that they were safe. Two ladies clung to the fragments of the boat, and employed themselves in shrieking lustily.

Half a score of boating men strained every nerve to reach the distressed damsels.

Eventually all got safe to land, the ladies much bedraggled and much inclined to faint.

But Roselle lay motionless on the green turf, white and very pitiful.

Her father had arrived, and was busy administering stimulants to both George and Roselle.

Presently Roselle opened her eyes, and sighed deeply.

"Dear papa," she whispered, "take me home; I am so ill. Was—was Mr. Purcell saved?"

"Yes, dearest, all saved, thank Heaven! A wonderful escape for you! I shudder when I think of it!"

"And I, papa."

She threw out her arms as she spoke, and touched George Purcell's hand.

He clasped it gently, and she burst into tears. Ralph Aitken noted the action, and ground his teeth with rage.

"Had it not been for him," he whispered to himself, savagely, "and my thought of him and Roselle, we should not have been 'over the weir.'"

CHAPTER III.

FADING AWAY.

MR. AITKEN was standing before the drawing-room grate, speaking to the boys.

"Ralph, how did this accident happen? You are always on the river; and George Purcell—"

"Stop!" interrupted Ralph; "it was his fault altogether! Hang George Purcell! I, for one, have had enough of him! He is a guest of yours, sir, or I should speak far more strongly of that young gentleman!"

"Why, Ralph, what has occurred to make you speak of George Purcell in that fashion?"

Ralph crossed over to Mr. Aitken's side, and touched him lightly on the shoulder.

"Hark ye, father!" he said, in a voice quiv-

ering with wrathful emotion. "Would you like George Purcell to marry our Roselle?"

"What!" exclaimed the banker. "How dare you, sir—how dare you?"

"I dare to tell the truth, sir! George Purcell believes he is to make Roselle his wife; and she—"

"She?" interrupted his father. "What of your sister?"

"This is neither time nor place to discuss such a matter," said Ralph, reddening. "I will speak to you on the subject when we are alone."

Mr. Aitken trembled and shuddered at the idea of losing his girl.

"You had better see me in the library in the morning, Ralph," said Mr. Aitken, gravely.

"I have been upset—thoroughly knocked over to-day. And now we have the house full of invalids."

"Not we," laughed one of the younger lads.

"Miss Simpson and Letitia James will show up at breakfast time, you may be certain. No ducking would prevent those mature young ladies from enjoying their matutinal meal."

"Hold your tongue, you young rascal!" laughed the banker. "You are too precocious! And now we had better go to bed. To-morrow will be a busy day, and I shall expect a very anxious night. Roselle is so very fragile, that I fear some evil consequences may follow this accident, if we are not exceedingly careful of her."

"You must not think of that, sir," said Ralph. "A souse in the river is nothing to a girl who has lived like a mermaid all her life!"

"I hope not," said the banker, dubiously. "But, for all that, I wish we had kept the people at home."

"So do I," said Ralph. "Hang all picnics! We might have had a pleasant holiday but for the silly idea of eating a luncheon up the river."

"It was George Purcell's arrangement," grumbled Roselle's youngest brother. "I wish he would not be so very handy with his suggestions."

"Come, you leave George alone!" said the banker, sternly. "He behaved well, and I will not hear a word said against him. Ralph is annoyed with him—for what reason I know not; and you youngsters follow suit. I hope all of you will turn out as promising as George Purcell."

Ralph flushed with anger.

The boys left the room, and the banker was alone.

In his heart he felt a growing conviction that Roselle loved George Purcell.

He sighed heavily, for he himself had been similarly placed in the days of his youth.

But then things were different. He had been poor and struggling, and his wife poorer even than himself.

Roselle had been nurtured in luxury, and the comforts of *his* home were a part of *her* life. But above and beyond all this, was the fact of her presence in the domestic circle.

To return to a home without Roselle for its presiding genius would be lonesome indeed.

Midnight came, and the old nurse softly entered the room. She touched him lightly, and he started.

"What is it?" he queried, impatiently.

The woman viewed him attentively; then spoke in a soft voice.

"I thought you would like to hear of Miss Roselle before you retired," she said, timidly.

He roused himself.

"Yes," he said. "What of her?"

"She is much better," she returned. "She would like to see you if it is not too late."

"Too late?—no!" he said. "How is Mr. Purcell?"

The nurse shook her head.

"He is hurt," she said, "though he will not confess it. Dr. Bruce thinks he will be confined to his room for some time."

The banker started.

"This is the first I have heard of it," he said.

"The doctor said nothing about it."

"He made the doctor promise to say nothing about it, sir," said the nurse. "It is not his fault that you know now."

"It is not a matter of fault at all," said the banker, coldly. "You have a right to keep me informed of what is going forward in the household. I should not take it kindly if you did not do so."

"Thank you, sir!" said Mrs. Widowson.

"And now will you see Miss Roselle, sir?"

"Certainly, I will," answered the banker. "I shall be only too glad to do so. Lead the way, nurse."

She did so, and Mr. Aitken followed her to Roselle's room.

Roselle was awake, and very feverish.

"Dear papa," she whispered, as he bent over her, "how is Mr. Purcell?"

"He is getting on well enough," replied the banker.

A keen pang went to his heart.

"No thought of any one but George Purcell!" he reflected, wearily.

He kissed his favorite child, and bade Heaven bless her.

Then he went to his couch, and tossed about restlessly till the break of day.

Next morning there was a strange restraint in the household. Mr. Aitken was nervous and unhappy; and Ralph was sullen and obstinate. He did not even ask after his friend and companion.

"How is Roselle?" he said, quietly.

"She is better," returned his father. "Nurse says she has passed a good night."

"That is well," said Ralph, with a long-drawn sigh. "I shall go to business all the happier for having heard that."

"And I, too," remarked the banker, gravely. "Ralph, I have a word to say to you before you leave."

The young man's face grew very stern and white.

"I am at your disposal, sir," he said. "I have a quarter of an hour to spare, and shall be glad to devote it to you."

"Very well, then," quoth his father; "we will go together." He rose as he spoke, and placed his hand on Ralph's shoulder. "Come, boy!" he said.

There was a tenderness in his manner that went straight to Ralph's heart.

He knew what was coming. He felt quite certain his father was about to plead for George. And then—well, then he grew angry with him, with himself, and Roselle.

The banker led the way to the library. A rare old fashioned room it was, too.

Around the oak-paneled walls rested the thoughts and fancies of many an author, choice-ly bound, and carefully tended.

It was the favorite room of the house, for here fancy could wander untrammelled to the distant ends of the earth, or in home scenes always fresh and new, because so lifelike and real.

This was Roselle's favorite resort. Here was she to be found in the still summer days, devouring old romances and histories, devoutly believing in heroes and heroines, as young girls are prone to do.

And here, in the retreat sanctified by the care and tenderness of a loving heart and hands, father and son met to settle her future.

They were both proud men. The banker, from his knowledge of the world and established position, held his head high.

The reflex of his father's position and wealth belonged of right to his son and heir, and Ralph knew it.

So, when the two sat opposite each other in the bay window facing the lawn, Ralph's countenance was that of his father, only younger, and more mobile in its expression.

The banker was the first to speak. He played with his watch-chain nervously, and smiled with his lips, though his eyes were dull and heavy.

"Ralph, my boy," he commenced, "you spoke to me last night respecting your sister and—George Purcell."

"Yes, father. I need not tell you how much Roselle is to me—to you—to all of us. She has been more than a sister; for, since my mother's death, she has been a mother to us all. Yes, young as she is, I say she is all the world to us."

"I know it—I feel it as deeply as you do, Ralph," said Mr. Aitken, in a broken voice. "Heaven bless her, yes!"

"I suppose she will marry some day; and when she does, I hope it will be with some man of position and influence. A duke might be proud of Roselle!" said Ralph.

"And with reason, too," quoth the banker, a wan smile flitting over his face. "But, in a matter of this kind, we must be very careful. Roselle herself must have a voice in it; and that is, of course, impossible while she is ill."

"True enough," said Ralph; "but your word will have great weight with her."

Mr. Aitken considered gravely for a moment; then he said, "Hark ye, Ralph! I do not wish to part with your sister at any time, and certainly cannot force her inclination. She is such a child, it seems ridiculous to discuss her future, and I tell you candidly I do not like it."

"Nor I," said Ralph. "But it is one of those unpleasant things one cannot avoid under certain circumstances, and I have no hesitation in saying that George Purcell is not the sort of man I should encourage."

The young fellow spoke very angrily and the banker felt it keenly.

After all, he was getting into years, and Ralph must succeed him in the natural order of things.

And then, Roselle was so very dear to them all. If he felt angry with his eldest son for a moment, the feeling was but transitory.

"Very well, then," he said; "let it be as you wish. I am not at all sure I am doing right, Ralph, but your wishes shall be respected as far as I am concerned."

Then the two men shook hands.

"You understand, father. I have no wish to dictate to you, or interfere with what does not concern me," said Ralph, in a grave tone. "But in this matter I ought to have a voice. Roselle has no mother, and—and—"

"Her brother must take her place," interrupted the banker, with a keen sense of humiliation.

"No; not altogether that, dad," returned Ralph. "Let it be a family matter, and among ourselves. We both have her interest at heart, have we not?"

"Heaven bless her!" murmured Mr. Aitken, fondly. "I give way to you in this, Ralph; but, remember, Roselle is to know nothing of it. George Purcell has saved her life, and to show anything like discourtesy to the young man must not be thought of."

"I shall not show him any discourtesy," said Ralph. "He is our guest, and as such I shall treat him. Besides, it would be only encouraging Roselle to think him a martyr; and pity is akin to love, you know."

"Let the matter rest there, then," said Mr. Aitken; "and remember, boy, the first thing to do is to get them both well again. We shall have plenty of opportunities to go into details, if need be, hereafter."

"So be it," said Ralph. "I am sorry there has been any necessity for discussion; but difficulties are half conquered when looked boldly in the face."

"Bravo, Ralph!" cried his father. "Stick to that as a commercial maxim, and your fortune is made."

The young man laughed, and colored.

"I hope to follow your footsteps, sir," he said. "I shall be well content to be as successful."

After this the two journeyed to the city. Ralph went up to see George Purcell before starting; but he was fast asleep, and his nurse would not allow him to be disturbed.

Roselle was better; that was a great comfort. On her account, at all events, no danger need be apprehended.

But with George it was different. He was hurt, as his kindly nurse had very truly said.

His thoughts wandered, though he strove hardly to keep them in their usual groove.

Weeks passed on, and Ralph began to grow anxious and thoughtful. It seemed only yesterday the accident happened; but, for all that, George Purcell lay on his bed, and the doctor shook his head ominously.

"I have done my best, and failed," he said, in answer to the banker's inquiry. "You may have fresh advice; indeed, I would recommend you to do so; for the poor young fellow, despite my skill, seems 'fading away.'"

CHAPTER IV.

ROSELLE ASSERTS HER POSITION.

ROSELLE had recovered her health; but she had changed wofully.

Ever in the right place at the right time; always at the post of duty, Roselle was still the good fairy of the household.

As the summer merged into autumn, and the trees put on their russet garb, Mr. Aitken grew anxious and uneasy.

Ralph was angry, though he had no cause to complain.

George Purcell had left. His name was no longer a household word.

There was a sort of tacit understanding that his name was not to be mentioned.

Roselle grew paler and thinner, and her father grew seriously alarmed.

Doctor after doctor was tried, with no success. They could not minister to a mind diseased.

Ever in her thoughts was the image of her lover, as she had seen him that day of the picnic.

The forget-me-nots he had plucked for her were carefully kept in her desk; and many times she kissed them.

Yet she strove hard to forget him. Her duty, she said to herself, was plain and simple.

She had to see to the family and its well-doing. What more had she a right to ask or expect than the approbation of those nearest and dearest to her?

And yet she looked forward to a time to come when George and she would be united, as they were now in heart.

But the time was not yet ripe.

"Oh, for the golden days!" she sung, sorrowfully.

That little bit of sunshine in her life, brief though it was, haunted her day and night.

"Roselle was not herself," her brother said; and, truly, she was not.

Day by day she grew more wan and pale.

The banker, angry at first, now began to be alarmed.

He spoke to her on the subject. It was a fine autumn day, and Roselle had been walking in the garden in the early morning.

The old gardener had been showing her some choice flowers, and Mr. Aitken thought he had never seen his daughter look more beautiful.

But this notwithstanding, there was no mistaking one thing—any unprofessional spectator could see Roselle was in very ill health.

She had a cough, too—a dry, hard cough, suggestive of consumptive tendencies.

But still she kept her spirits, and answered her medical man laughingly, as though there was nothing whatever the matter with her.

That sinking of the heart which was engendered by George Purcell's absence was her secret, sacred to her own breast.

It was a secret she loved, for it was connected with the brightest period of her life.

The banker met her as she came toward the house, and drew her hand through his arm.

He patted it fondly ere he spoke.

"You are not looking well, dear," he said. "I am afraid this place is too damp for you—too near the river, perhaps. Well, well, we will change it, and remove to another neighborhood for the winter, shall we?"

Tears came into Roselle's eyes. She strove hard to keep them back, but could not do so.

"Oh, no, papa," she answered. "I cannot leave the dear old spot. It is home to me; I should not be happy in any other place."

"Why not?" asked Mr. Aitken.

"Because I should not be able to hear the ripple of the water, and the noise of the fall, papa."

"And you like them, Roselle?"

"Oh, yes, papa. The river speaks to me; I love it. I am never dull or lonely when I look upon the stream, rushing onward—ever onward—to the sea!"

"Now you are crying, Roselle, and I must not see you cry," said her father, with great emotion. "Come, what is the matter with you?"

"Nothing, papa."

"And so you cry?"

"Yes, papa," answered Roselle, with a serio-comic grimace.

"You are growing thin and pale, my darling," said the banker. "Tell me what ails you. Doctors seem of no service. What more can I do for you?"

"Nothing, papa," she replied. Then she leaned her head on his shoulder, and burst into a passion of sobbing.

"Don't do that, for Heaven's sake!" cried the banker. "My dear, what is it?"

"I am not well, papa; and—and I think I am going to be very ill. Oh, papa, I think we had better go away, after all!"

"Changeable as a woman!" murmured Mr. Aitken. "Well, dear, you shall do as you please. My only object is to please you."

"Thanks, dear papa!" said Roselle. "And—and you must not think of me altogether. There is Ralph to be considered."

"Ralph will do, I think, as I arrange. In any case, he will not interfere with any plan likely to conduce to your health and comfort. Now, have you any other obstacle for me to meet?"

"None, papa. Only I do hope I shall get better. It is so wretched to feel ill, and not know the reason why."

"So it is, dear," assented the banker, quietly. "Change of scene will do wonders for you."

"I hope so, papa; I really do. Of late, I have had such strange, weird fancies."

She spoke almost solemnly. Her father shuddered, though he knew not why.

"Of what do you think, Roselle?" he asked, pleasantly.

"Of all sorts of things, papa. I feel as though I were continually drifting down some huge stream, and am powerless to prevent myself from rushing on to destruction."

"That is but a reflex of one scene in your life, dear. You will forget it in time; or, at most, it will have but a place in your memory as a matter of trivial import."

Roselle sighed wearily. She knew better, but would not shake her father's faith.

In her heart she felt quite certain that that one scene and that one day would abide with her as long as she lived.

"Well, then, papa, what do you wish me to do?" she asked at last.

"Why, I do not know that I have any wish on the subject. One thing is certain: your health is not good, and must be re-established somehow, somewhere. Now, what shall we do?"

"I would rather remain here, if the choice is left to me. Oh, papa, I should droop and die if I were sent away!"

"Then you must not be sent away, dear," her father said. "The house will be lonely and sad without you. You have taken your poor, dear mother's place so long and so perfectly, I should be loth to lose you even for a month."

Roselle pressed her father's arm lovingly.

"Papa," she said, "may I ask a question?"

"A hundred, if you like, child. Why not? To whom would you apply, if not to your father?"

They had halted by this time, and stood facing each other.

"Papa," said Roselle, "George Purcell saved my life at the imminent peril of his own. I have no mother—no sister; so am forced to speak to you."

"Yes, yes, dear," remarked Mr. Aitken, nervously. "You wish to know—"

"Why Mr. Purcell does not come here now? Why he left so hurriedly, almost before he was convalescent? Why was all this, papa?"

"My dear child, what a very strange question to ask! As though I could control a young man's movements! My dear Roselle, consider."

"I have considered, papa. The thought has been troubling me for many a long day. There must be some reason for his sudden departure. What is it?"

Mr. Aitken was sorely puzzled. He could not tell the truth. Falsehood was repugnant to him.

What could he say to this fair young creature, with her wide-open eyes and parted lips?

He stared at her for a moment in silence; then replied, gently: "My dear, Ralph and George did not agree well together; and, of course, I had to consider Ralph."

"Consider Ralph!" she echoed, scornfully. "Oh, papa, surely *you* did not send him away?"

"No, dear."

"Then Ralph did. It was very cruel of him. Why, I had not even an opportunity given me to thank him for his devotion. And he ill, too, and almost friendless!"

Mr. Aitken felt very uncomfortable. He had given way to his eldest son, and now his daughter upbraided him for doing so.

There was no help for it. He must speak sternly, or fail miserably. Roselle was trembling with suppressed emotion, and the banker felt that now or never the truth must be told.

"Listen, Roselle," he said, in a hard, cold voice. "You know how I have made a position in the world, do you not?"

"Yes, papa," she returned.

"By sheer hard work—by industry and application—by toiling and slavery from morning till night; and now, dear, I am tolerably rich, have a horror of poverty, and so—"

"You cannot afford to have poor people about you, papa," interrupted Roselle, scornfully.

"Just so, my dear. You have hit the blot exactly. People say it is no crime to be poor. Neither is it. But to take a plant from a rich, warm soil, and put it in a poor, cold one, means death to the plant."

Roselle caught her breath with a little sob.

"A poor simile, papa, and not complimentary to the plant. If it were fit for anything in every-day life, surely it should be more hardy? Trouble doesn't kill, though foolish people say it does."

"My daughter has no knowledge of the outside world, thank Heaven!" said Mr. Aitken. "She does not know what poverty, or even the semblance of it, means."

"I think she does, papa. She feels quite certain that wealth should not be the great aim of life, though so many people do make it their idol. But I am not worldly wise, I suppose."

"No, dear, you are not; and perhaps it is well for you, Roselle. I will do what I can to push George Purcell's fortune; more than that I cannot say. Indeed, but for the very exceptional circumstances connected with that most unfortunate day of the picnic, I should not say so much."

"Thank you, papa," said Roselle. Her color came and went quickly. "And when his fortune is made we may hope to see him again, I suppose?"

"I do not say that," returned the banker, gravely. "His position just now is that of a struggling, fortuneless young man. As such, I shall be glad to help him; in any other way, I regret to say, it is impossible."

He offered his arm to his daughter as he spoke the last words, and for the first time in her life he saw in her face a look of that same

dogged obstinacy which had carried himself on to success and fortune.

In a man, it was well enough; but in this gentle girl it was startling.

She clasped her hands on his arm, and looked up into his face with a sad, piteous glance.

"You are not cross with me, papa?" she said.

"No, dear. 'Live and forget,' says some musty old proverb. Better learn that early in life than when the gray hairs come. It is a difficult matter then."

And this was Roselle's first lesson in life—"Live and forget." How could she? She had but to touch the piano to remember *his* voice. The flowing river murmured of him, the forget-me-nots would not fade from her memory, though the poor little flowers were as dead as her hopes.

"Forget George Purcell." This was the refrain of her song, and she hated to have to sing it.

It is so different when one has grown old and weary; but to the young plant just putting forth the tender leaves, every little cutting is a wrench to its very heart's core.

Roselle had indeed asserted her position. She had come as near as it was possible to come to the mystery of George Purcell's absence, and the result was "heartache." Father and daughter strolled into the house.

In the pretty drawing-room he stooped over and kissed her fondly.

"Think of my lonely life, dear," he said, "and how very precious to us all you are. Why, I could never think of you except in your own character and with your own name. Be sure you will never have a name so sweet as 'Our Roselle.'"

He patted her on the shoulder, and presently left the room.

"Our Roselle!" murmured the girl, wearily. Then she buried her face in her hands, and cried, with exceeding bitterness, "If only she had been poor!"

This was her thought. She knew none of the miseries attendant upon poverty.

She had a vague idea that it must be uncomfortable to lead the life of a poor girl—that was all.

But, like a golden thread in a somber garment, George Purcell's image gilded the picture of even a poverty-stricken life.

The river flowed by the lawn, and sparkled bright in the autumn sunshine, but it gave her no hope. She and George were parted, perhaps never to meet again.

CHAPTER V.

AN ACCIDENTAL MEETING.

MR. AITKEN and Ralph held a long conversation that night.

Roselle had gone early to bed, refusing all the entreaties of her young brothers to sit up and amuse them.

"I am tired and weary," she said. "Pray let me go."

Mr. Aitken passed the matter off cheerfully enough, though his heart sunk within him.

Ralph opened the door for her as she left the room, and whispered a good night blessing.

The evening was dull without Roselle.

The lads talked loudly as lads will talk, and quarreled among themselves, till Mr. Aitken rose to retire.

There was no peacemaker to-night, and every one felt it keenly.

It was with almost an angry glance the banker looked at Ralph, as he requested him to follow to the library.

Midnight sounded from the stable clock ere their conference ended.

What took place at that interview was never known.

One thing was certain; the interview had been a stormy one.

As Ralph passed his father on the stairs, and bade him good night, his features were set in stern resolve.

The two men were strangely alike in countenance, and Ralph this night looked old and worn, despite his youth.

He sat for a full hour at his bedroom window, smoking and thinking.

"It shall never be with my consent," he soliloquized, as he laid down his pipe; "that I swear! Come weal or woe, *he* shall never marry Roselle!"

Toward his old friend and companion he now bore a blind and unreasoning aversion.

He knew right well his sterling worth and honesty.

No man in the world appreciated "character" more than the banker, and in this his son was at one with him.

But for Roselle to marry a man simply on that account—and a poor man, too—was entirely out of the question.

Her happiness was certainly his care; but in the school in which he had been brought up, money was power—the keystone to the arch of existence.

Next morning the family met at breakfast as usual.

Nothing was said, yet a constraint was apparent upon them all.

Roselle looked very pale—fragile her father thought.

She ate nothing, toyed nervously with the food on her plate, and altogether looked miserable and out of spirits.

The banker read the *Times*, as usual, and studied the money article as only such magnates do.

Presently he put down the paper and spoke to Roselle.

"You are not looking well, dear," he commenced. "You must have a little change of some kind."

She smiled, and shook her head.

"Fancy, papa; only fancy."

"Maybe. I never contradict a lady, though it be my own daughter," said the banker, gallantly. "I see the Winter Exhibition opens to-day; what do you think of running up and seeing the pictures?"

"I should like it very much," answered Roselle; "but can you spare the time, papa?"

"Can I spare time?" cried Mr. Aitken, uplifting his eyes. "What are you thinking of, Roselle? I never take a holiday—never!"

Roselle smiled.

"Dear papa," she said, "business is a tyrant; just now it conquers you. Some day—"

"I shall have the victory, dear," interrupted Mr. Aitken; "and then will come Ralph's turn. To-day I will give him a holiday, and he can take you to the show."

"All of us, dad; what's sauce for the goose will do for the gander. We must all go," shouted the lads, in a lusty chorus.

"As you please, my boys. Mind and behave yourselves, though. Roselle, will you take them?"

"Yes, papa. I love pictures, and our boys love roaming about and getting into mischief; so the arrangement will suit all round!"

The boys roared out a remonstrance, and amid much laughter and pleasant fun, the journey was determined on.

Ralph was very proud of his pretty sister this November day. In her furs and coquettish hat, with its gold arrow stuck jauntily through the front, who so sonsie and bewitching as "Our Roselle?"

True, she was pale; but her eyes beamed brightly, and the run to the station brought a color to her cheeks like peach-blossom.

The anticipation of enjoyment gave a life and vitality to her movements very pleasant to see.

Ralph noted this with great pleasure.

"Perhaps she has been kept too quiet and tranquil," he thought.

In that home washed by the river, silent and solitary, peace was, perchance, too much in the ascendant.

Be that as it may, he was gladdened at the sight of her bright face, for Roselle was very near and dear to his heart.

"We are to have a very happy morning, Roselle," he said, as they walked the railway platform arm-in-arm.

"Yes, dear brother. Do you know I feel better to-day than I have done since—since—"

"Ah, yes; since you first began to droop," he interrupted. "Now there go our lads to the refreshment-room, and I must needs ask you to follow. They are the hungriest fellows, I believe, in the whole country."

"Happy boys!" said Roselle, sighing. "How I envy them!"

"You had better emulate rather than envy them," laughed Ralph. "You are not so very delicate as not to be able to eat luncheon."

"I am not delicate at all, dear," she said. "And I am very hungry, and could almost eat stale buns."

"Then you really have a splendid appetite," cried Ralph, gleefully. "Now, then, here we are; and, mind, I will keep you to your word."

So the party sat down to a merry meal. Roselle ate and drank sparingly, notwithstanding her hunger.

Ralph plied her with good things, and her younger brothers followed his example, but she soon grew tired and languid.

Somehow, of late, she had had that new, strange feeling steal over her.

A little excitement drove it from her for a short time; then the restless feeling came back again and she drooped despite all her efforts.

It was so to-day; Ralph noted it, and set his teeth hard, and clenched his fist furtively.

He knew the reason of it; but he abated no jot of his resolution. He hoped that time would work a cure, and Roselle forget her lover of the past.

That so young and gentle a girl could cling to a memory seemed to him well-nigh impossible.

Had he read Roselle's thoughts, he would have been angry indeed; for she still cherished her hope of meeting George again.

Even now, as they prepared for departure, she was dreaming of the past, in which George Purcell figured so prominently.

"Come, Roselle, let us be moving," said Ralph, as he paid the bill. She nodded pleasantly, and rose as he spoke.

Many eyes followed her graceful figure as she left the room.

The boys ran hither and thither, calling cabs, and made themselves a general nuisance; but Roselle stood quietly watching the human stream melting away, and took no heed of their pranks.

By and by they reached the gallery. It was new and fashionable, and crowds stood before the celebrated paintings, admiring, criticising, detracting.

One picture was so besieged by the throng it could scarcely be approached. As quickly as one person moved away, two or three others crowded into the vacant space.

Ralph waited patiently, programme in hand, and Roselle stood by his side.

"What can be the fascination about that one painting, I wonder?" quoth Ralph, rather petulantly.

Roselle shook her head.

"It must be something out of the common," she returned, "for we have been longing for a peep this quarter of an hour."

Ralph turned over his book.

"One hundred and seventy-two," he murmured. "The Last Farewell."

Roselle shivered.

"What an ominous title!" she said, nervously; "is it not, Ralph?"

"Oh, I don't know; painters and poets are fond of weird titles. I dare say the story is a common one enough. Farewells are said every day, and the whirligig of time still goes on. While the world lasts, regrets will last, too. It is only a question of degree and time."

"Yes," said Roselle; "that is very true, Ralph. How very true it is!"

She spoke in a whisper, and once again Ralph grew angry with himself. How unlucky he was in his speech!

Somehow it seemed as though he could not avoid leading Roselle's thoughts to the one subject he was so anxious to avoid.

It was quite a relief to him when the crowd parted, and they stood facing the celebrated work of art.

Roselle could hardly restrain a little cry, for the scene was familiar to her. There was the weir and the dashing water she remembered so well, and on the banks of the still pool far below stood two lovers.

A fair, handsome youth, with all his soul in his eyes, was looking down upon a dark-browed girl, whose features were contracted with convulsive pain.

The story needed no telling. As in the olden time pictures told life-histories, so did this one.

It came home straight to the heart; and that, after all, is the golden mean of success.

"It is very human," she whispered to Ralph. "I am glad I have seen it. I am very glad indeed!"

Her lips quivered as she spoke, and a faint shiver ran through her frame.

Ralph stared in astonishment at the canvas, and drew a long breath.

"It is Lockwood Weir!" he said, at last. "Wonderfully well painted, too! The water seems to be actually flowing. I wonder if the figures are portraits?"

"I should think they were," said Roselle. "How could any man dream of such a scene had he not been present?"

"Artists have quick imaginations," said Ralph. "Given a landscape, they can fill in the figures, and tell the tale with singular accuracy and beauty."

"Some of them can, sir," said a strange voice. "It requires years of study to do it, though; and added to that there must be soul."

Ralph turned, and looked at the speaker.

He was a tall, high-shouldered young man, with a pale face, and deep brown eyes. He was attired in a brown velvet coat and soft felt hat, and wore his hair in long curling profusion.

"You are an artist yourself, I presume, sir?" said Ralph, smilingly.

"Yes. Not a great one—not even a successful one; but hard-working and plodding, I think and hope."

"Those qualities ought to lead to success, I fancy," said Ralph, pleasantly.

"They might in anything else in life. But here is my friend approaching, and I must bid you good-day."

He raised his hat as he spoke the last words, and Roselle looked after him with great interest in her glance.

A friend of such a man as this must be worth seeing.

A visionary and enthusiast, probably, like unto his artist friend; an unworldly, unwise man, who spoke from the heart, and not from the brain.

"Well, Max," she heard some one say, in a familiar voice, "and how good or bad are the pictures, and which are the gems?"

She stared straight before her, and trembled.

A mist swam before her eyes, for the speaker was George Purcell.

Yes, George; looking very weary and unhappy; somehow, utterly unlike the George of old, but still the loved one of her young heart.

She clasped Ralph's arm tightly, or she must have fallen prone on the floor, she felt so faint and giddy.

"Oh, Ralph!" she whispered, "there is George Purcell!"

No need to tell Ralph that. He had recognized his voice in a moment.

And in that one moment came a yearning to call him by his old familiar name, and put his hand on his shoulder affectionately, as he used to do in the days gone by.

Had it not been for Roselle, he would probably have done so. In his heart he admired and respected him.

But Roselle—ay, there was the rub. He

felt almost jealous of her. He had schooled himself to think of her as his special trust, and could not give her to George Purcell.

When Roselle whispered his name, he grew stern in a moment. The smile which had been playing on his lips died away. He did not mean to quarrel with him—far from it; but by his manner fully intended to show his late friend and companion that he could never occupy the position again of a favored member of the Aitken household.

So, while Roselle's breath was coming and going in little gasps, Ralph turned, and stared George full in the face.

"How do you do, Mr. Purcell?" he said, coolly. "Like the rest of the world, come to see the pictures—eh?"

"Why, this is an unexpected meeting!" cried George, advancing eagerly, with outstretched hands. "And Miss Aitken, too—how is she?"

With a great effort, Roselle released her hand from Ralph's arm. He would fain have held it fast, but she would not have it so.

She held out her hand to George, trembling and shaking as it was, and looking fearlessly at the face she loved so dearly.

"I am so glad to see you!" she said. "But you are not looking well. London does not agree with you."

She would not address him as Mr. Purcell. She hardly liked to call him by the name so very dear to her.

Ralph interposed rather testily, "It is not the season of the year for any one to look very rosy. I see no difference in you, Purcell."

"I had good nursing both at your place and at home," he said; "but yet I don't feel quite the man I did before I met with that little accident."

"Little accident!" cried the boys, who had crowded round, and were clamoring for notice. "Well, if having your head nearly knocked off is a small affair, I should like to know what a large one is!" said the youngest lad.

"Oh, well, it is not worth talking of. Miss Aitken, you love pictures, I know. Allow me to introduce you to my friend, Max Raff, who paints them, you know."

"I introduced myself, George, a quarter of an hour ago," said Max, in his peculiar drawling tone. "I have already told Miss Aitken and her—her—"

"Brother!" interrupted Ralph, sharply.

"And her brother," resumed the young artist, "that I am a mechanic in the profession. But that does not prevent me admiring higher class work; and, therefore, I shall be happy to show them my pet pictures if they will trust themselves to my guidance."

Very unwillingly—almost ungraciously—Ralph gave up Roselle, and followed behind.

His position was a difficult one. He could not keep with the youngsters altogether, and certainly did not wish to stroll side by side with George Purcell.

All he could do was to follow in the wake of Roselle and Max Raff; and this he did.

A suspicion that Max guessed who Roselle was, and acted accordingly, never entered his head.

Nevertheless, it did so happen that George and Roselle found themselves side by side with Max, and her brothers between them and Ralph; and, though the latter chafed impatiently, he could not break through the barrier without being positively ungentlemanly.

He watched them keenly and eagerly. But their speech he could not hear.

Roselle was speaking. What was she murmuring to her lost lover? Something incoherent and disconnected, but which was, nevertheless, music in his ears.

For it told him plainly enough he was still in her thoughts and her heart; that her love had never wavered—that she would be constant always.

When he had learned the old lesson once again, he was content to wait.

Ralph looked unutterable things at the gentle girl, but she would not notice his frowns.

Such glimpses of sunshine as this meeting were rare and precious, and she prized them accordingly.

Very heartily she indorsed Max Raff's laughing remark, as they left the building.

"These accidental meetings are very pleasant," she said.

And all except Ralph cried, with one voice, "They are, indeed, quite delightful!"

But, for all that, Ralph swore to himself a bitter oath that, if he could manage it, George Purcell should not meet them again for many a long year.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TWO FRIENDS HATCH A PLOT.

GEORGE PURCELL walked home blithely, seeming as though he trod on air. Max did not disturb him by talking, for he fully entered into his friend's feelings, and, like most young foreigners, was delighted with a bit of romance in real life.

"George is an Englishman to the core of his heart," muttered Max to himself as he left him. "He will take a week to unthaw, and then I shall have to endure his raptures, and listen to a story I have heard at least a hundred times from all sorts and conditions of men."

In this Max was right. Not even to his widowed mother could George bring himself to mention Roselle and their happy meeting at the gallery.

Still less could he speak of it to his friend. The happiness of love was too precious to be spoken of as an ordinary thing.

He nursed it with tender, soft speech; spoke to himself of Roselle and the past; but to no other did he open his heart. But, as time went on, the lonely feeling which attaches itself so peculiarly to lovers apart grew too strong for him. He must have a confidant. And who would suit his love-born purpose better than Max Raff?

So he hied him to the young painter's studio, with serious thought intent.

He burst into the room, knocking down half a dozen pictures, and almost upsetting Max's easel.

Max welcomed him heartily.

"Sit down, if you can find room," he cried. "I am in a dreadful litter, as usual. Have a cigar, and open a bottle of beer for yourself."

George obeyed laughingly, and watched him for a few moments as his deft hand wielded the brush.

"Don't disturb me for ten minutes, George, for I am painting in a moonlight scene. After that I am your man for ten hours if you like," quoth Max.

"Less than that will serve, old fellow," said George. "I want your advice and—"

"Assistance, I suppose," interrupted Max, smilingly. "Well, both are at your disposal when I have finished this bit of canvas."

"All right; I am in no hurry, Max," said George, cheerily. "Your time is mine, and mine is my own, so we shall not quarrel about that."

Presently the painting was over, and Max drew his chair to George's side.

"Now I am ready to hear your story," he said, gravely.

"How do you know I have a story to tell?" asked George, with a curious sort of choking in his voice.

"How do I know?" echoed his friend, rather sadly. "Ah, George, I have listened to so many of the same kind. I suppose yours is like all the rest—full of love and disappointment, hopes and fears."

"Have you never had one of the same kind, Max?" inquired George, tenderly.

The painter laughed grimly.

"Perhaps yes, perhaps no. At all events, if I have been wounded, I show no scar."

"No; indeed you do not," said George. "One would never suspect you of a love-history."

Max turned his face away, and began to rummage among a lot of old pictures assiduously.

Presently he strode over to George's side, and laid his hand on his shoulder.

"You must not judge by appearances nor circumstances, dear boy," said Max, with great feeling in his tone. "Pray do not think I am like a man without a shadow. I have my history, but it is buried deep here."

He placed his hand upon his heart, and a tremor ran through his frame.

George wondered, and held his peace.

There was an air of solemnity about his friend he had never seen before. Max Raff was usually so gay and thoughtless: this new phase of character came to George almost as a revelation.

"Come, Max," he said; "I will be an egoist for once, and monopolize your attention."

Then he told his story in a low, broken voice.

"It is not every one I would speak thus to," he said. "To many it might sound sentimental and stupid; but to you, Max—"

"It sounds very human," interrupted his friend. "The world has grown old, George; the old-fashioned theories are exploded. Even humanity now runs upon scientific lines. Oh, for the good old days when the world was young!"

"The same joys and sorrows, the same heartaches ever obtained," remarked George. "History repeats itself, and in nothing so much as affairs of the heart."

"And now, dear boy, what is to be done?—how can I help you?"

"Oh, Max, if you could help me—if you only could! I can't tell you how much I care for her—how very dear she is to me! I could wait for her as Jacob waited for Rachel, a long seven years, if need be!"

He walked away to conceal his emotion, and Max waited patiently for his return.

"I am afraid I am not a great hand at conspiracy," he said; "but if you can devise some plan to carry out, in which you may need assistance, my services are at your disposal."

"Thanks, Max. I will think it over. I long to see her again. I do not wish to hang about the house, or even the neighborhood—you understand; but if I could only look upon her, myself unseen, I should be so very happy."

"And you fancy you could be content with that, George?"

"Yes; I am certain of it. I am haunted with the idea that Roselle is ill—pining away. She looked so thin and worn that day we saw her! I noticed it then, but was too happy to mention it to her; and now the recollection of it gives me pain."

"Well, just give me time to put my wits to work, and I may manage it for you; but go away now, for I am very busy. And, George, don't come back again for a whole week."

George laughed, and promised he would keep away for that period. He shook hands heartily with his friend, and departed full of a new, strange hope.

Meanwhile the banker's household was troubled greatly.

In spite of doctors and tonics, Roselle gradually grew worse.

Her father fretted and fumed, and Ralph grew mad with rage when he thought of George Purcell, and connected him with his favorite sister, and her languid, half heart-broken appearance.

More than ever did he harden his heart against him. It had become a mania with him, this hatred of his friend of former days.

Had Roselle been dying just then, and George Purcell able to save her young life, he would scarcely have sent for him.

And in time the banker himself grew to be of Ralph's opinion.

He was a worldly-wise, clever man; and though he did not affect anything like sentiment, was shrewd enough to see the change in his daughter, and attributed it to the right cause.

The banker was getting into years, and deferred to his eldest son rather more than he should have done. The prosperity which had made him what he was would, he hoped, be transferred to his boy when he himself was under the turf.

Ambition for himself he had none. Nor had he for Roselle.

She was necessary to his comfort, and that of his household.

Moreover, she was very lovable and gentle, and a pretty picture in the house.

With Ralph it was different. He loved his sister, and was also very proud of her.

"A coronet would not be ill bestowed upon our Roselle," he would say, proudly.

Mr. Aitken would laugh at him, and shake his head, but in his heart was not at all sure Ralph was not right in his remark.

So Roselle drooped and faded. Very gradually—almost imperceptibly—the fact came home to the banker, and from his lips the smooth-tongued doctors heard some very bitter truths.

"Why had they not told him before?"

This was his cry. In vain the physicians declared there was no sort of danger.

"It was only the weather," they said, in glib chorus; "and certainly Miss Aitken wanted tone, but—"

And here they wagged their heads knowingly, as clever men invariably do, and bowed themselves out.

It was a bitter winter day when the truth first dawned upon Mr. Aitken. Roselle could not come to the station to meet him, as was her wont.

He was chafed and annoyed. Business matters had perplexed and worried him rather more than usual that day, and the sweet companionship of his daughter would have been so very grateful to him.

The touch of her warm gloved hand, the low, cheery music of her voice, the smile of patient love which illness could not take from her—all these he missed sadly, and was cross with every one in proportion to his own disappointment.

"Why has not Roselle come?" he asked of one of the younger boys.

He spoke angrily and curtly.

"She is not sufficiently well, papa. She wanted to come, but had to give it up. She really did try."

"Drive your hardest, Ralph," said his father, suddenly. "I don't like to hear this of your sister. Now, lad, jump up."

"All right, papa," chirped the boy, as he clambered to his seat beside the man who had driven to the station.

"All safe behind, John?" asked Ralph of the servant.

"Quite right, sir," replied the man. "Oh, I beg pardon, sir, but the roan is rather fresh, and—"

The sentence was finished amid the clatter of the horses' hoofs and the wheels of the carriage.

"I like this traveling, John," said the lad, as the hedges flew past them, and the landscape was seen only for a moment at a time. "This is jolly, isn't it?"

"Mr. Ralph drives very well on level ground; but a baby could do that," muttered the man, angrily. Then he raised his voice, and said, "Yes, but it is a killing pace; and when we reach the hill he will have to put the curb on, or we shall all be pitched out."

The lad laughed, and pretended to be very fearful.

Evidently he looked upon pitching out, or being pitched out, as a capital practical joke.

Ralph was driving well—almost too well. At present he had his horses well in hand, and was paying attention to his business. His father was silent and thoughtful, and Ralph was not inclined for conversation.

They were nearing the hill by this time; and the man rose, and touched his young master's shoulder, to apprise him of the fact.

It was an unlucky moment. Ralph was al-

ways petulant; to-night he was nervous as well.

He looked round angrily; and in that moment lost a rein.

How it slipped from his hand he knew not. He had seemed to have a tight hold of both. He afterward had a dim remembrance of the roan mare leaping violently aside—that was all.

One thing was certain. The horses had the bits between their teeth, and were running away.

The surly servant clambered over, and, with a significant nod took the rein out of Ralph's hand.

But he might as well have remained in his seat. The hill was in sight, and no mortal power on earth could prevent a catastrophe.

The one chance likely to help them was not given them.

Had the hill been clear of vehicles, the horses might, by almost a miracle, have run themselves to a standstill.

But as in most cases, so in this. The one chance was denied them. Lumbering heavily up the incline was a wagon laden with hay.

The driver sat on the shafts half asleep, wholly stupid.

He cried out loudly as the carriage bore down upon him, but did not pull aside.

Instead, he wrung his hands in a hopeless fashion, and shouted, out exclamations in a manner which would have been ludicrous but for the serious position in which he was placed.

The banker sat quite still, paralyzed and horror-stricken.

Ralph looked straight before him, neither to the right nor the left.

His thought was of his father. If any one was taken away, he prayed it might not be his parent.

The lad and John held a whispered conversation—a few swift words only. "Follow my example; and when I say jump, come after me. You will want all your pluck."

"Yes, yes; but Ralph and papa—poor papa!" sobbed the lad.

There was no time for more. With a grinding crash the carriage seemed to split up into matchwood, and nothing was to be heard but the shrill neighing of the horses and the groans of the wounded men.

The wagoner crept forward, lantern in hand, and viewed the chaotic ruin with rueful looks. His own horses were mixed up with those belonging to the carriage, and the four were kicking violently.

The instinct of the driver conquered the humanity of the man. He began to cut the traces and get up the cattle, as such boorish fellows do, without any idea of helping the injured people.

And some were terribly hurt, too.

The stillness, almost awful in its solemnity, was broken by groans and sighs and tearful sobs.

Two were not much injured. These were the young lad and John, the coachman.

They had leaped at almost the same moment from the carriage, and had been jerked violently over the hedge into the field beyond.

Dazed, stupefied, and half stunned they certainly were, but, fortunately, they had no bones broken; and when they had recovered their breath were not much the worse for the adventure.

By-and-by they clambered through a gap in the hedge, and appeared upon the scene.

It was difficult for a moment to discover the real extent of the mischief done.

The carriage horses were standing trembling in every limb, and snorting with alarm.

The wagoner's cattle were on their feet, and the driver was surveying them anxiously, irrespective of the surroundings.

John staggered to him, and touched him smartly on the shoulder.

"Now then, yokel," he said, "just lend a hand here, will you? Human beings are before horses—ain't they, eh?"

"I dunno," quoth the man, helplessly.

"Lord help us; there has been a great crush up, ain't there? What will my master say?"

For answer, the groom took him by the ear, and pulled it rather savagely.

"Hark ye!" he said, in a menacing tone. "Leave your wretched cattle, and come with me. Bring your lantern—d'ye hear?"

The man did so in a stolid, sulky manner.

Then the two began their search for the banker and his son Ralph.

The latter they soon found. He lay under the hedge, insensible, with a tiny rivulet of blood flowing from his temples. He was breathing heavily, as though in a deep sleep.

They roused him, and walked him up and down the hard road, talking to him meanwhile; for the drowsy feeling was still upon him, and he could not answer a question nor speak a word intelligibly.

He was thoroughly shaken, dazed, bewildered; otherwise, not much hurt.

Leaving him to his brother's care, John began to search for Mr. Aitken.

He found him presently, doubled up in a strange unshapely form. The foam at his lip, the blood trickling from his nostrils, the utter prostration and loss of power, told its own tale.

No need to take a doctor's opinion here. To all intents and purposes, the banker was a dead man.

Dead, yet living; sentient, yet having no feeling beyond the sluggish knowledge that he was not yet called away.

He spoke feebly, and asked for his boys. From manhood he had gone back to the bearing of a child.

He shed tears as the younger son came up and pillowed his head on his breast—tears which were the more pathetic because they mixed with those of his boy.

By this time Ralph had partially recovered. He staggered, rather than walked, to his father, and knelt beside him.

"How goes it, dad?" he asked, in a choking whisper.

The banker shook his head. "It's all over with me, Ralph," he whispered, huskily. "I can't move. It's only carrying me home to die!"

Ralph wiped the clammy perspiration from his father's forehead, and pressed his hand.

"Don't talk like that," he said. "Where are you hurt?"

The banker groaned. "Here, boy—here!" he said, pressing his hand to his back.

Ralph touched him very tenderly; but, slight as was the touch, it caused his father exquisite pain.

"We must get you home somehow, dad," he said, in a low voice. "The question is, how are we to manage it?"

"I don't know," groaned the banker; "but I feel very sick and ill. Get me home somehow!"

"I will try to do so," said Ralph. Then he called out to the wagoner, and requested him to lend a hand.

The man obeyed rather surlily.

It was not that he would not be well paid for his pains; but that innate love of cattle, implanted so firmly in the bucolic mind, was uppermost in his thoughts.

Ralph and his brother made a sort of rest among the trusses of hay, and, with the assistance of John and the stolid driver of the wagon, managed to place the banker in something like a comfortable position.

"Now, John," said Ralph, "take one of the horses and ride home for your life! Call in as you pass, and request Doctor Sully to be at the house."

The groom nodded, touched his forelock, mounted one of the horses, and rode away at a rapid pace.

Then Ralph and his brother clambered into the wagon, and, between them, took Mr. Aitken in their arms.

He fell into a lethargic state, heeding nothing. Now and again he would endeavor to press Ralph's hand, but the exertion was too

much for him, and he soon fell back into his old position. What an eternity it seemed! The slow-moving conveyance almost maddened Ralph.

There was no help for it, however. The lumbering vehicle was more comfortable than a fast-traveling carriage.

There was some comfort in that. And every step they took nearer home Ralph felt more anxious and wretched.

He had to break the news to Roselle.

It never struck him that long before he reached home Roselle would know all. He had not warned the groom.

When they came in sight of the house it was evident they were expected. Lights flashed from every window, the hall door was wide open, and Roselle stood in the doorway, wrapped in a fleecy white shawl.

Shivering and trembling, the young girl stood ready to face this, the greatest trouble of her life.

Everything was forgotten now but papa. The world was changed to Roselle. All her old familiar faces and scenes had passed away.

Dr. Sully was waiting in the pretty parlor, anxious and nervous.

He had essayed some commonplace sentences of condolence, but Roselle had begged him in a piteous whisper, to leave her to herself.

Her brothers stood behind her, looking at each other with scared countenances.

This was the scene as the wagon drove up to the house.

Kindly hands and strong arms were ready to bear the banker into the room he was not to leave again alive.

Roselle took the poor, weak hand, hanging so limp and lifeless by her father's side, and kissed it fondly.

Ill as she was, she insisted upon nursing the invalid. At first the doctor forbade her peremptorily.

But her firm tone overcame his scruples, and he reluctantly consented.

Ralph waited for the doctor, and took him aside.

"Tell me the exact truth, doctor," he said. "Is there any danger—any real danger, I mean?"

"You must take your father's place now," the doctor said, gently; "he will never be able to attend to business again. His spine is injured, and all the surgeons in the world could not help him!"

Then Ralph broke down. His one great characteristic was love for his family. Pride and affection combined made him very jealous for the family pride and honor.

For his father he had a high esteem. Roselle he loved dearly, too; but his father was all in all to him.

Doctor Sully placed his hand on his shoulder.

"Remember," he said, "you have a great responsibility now. You must take refreshment and rest. Your brave sister is setting you all an example."

After this, the kindly-hearted man bustled about, and made himself busy, though he had really little or nothing to do.

The long night passed on. The cold, gray dawn found the family assembled round the banker's bed.

The sands of his life were rapidly running out. He was perfectly conscious, though he could not speak much.

He beckoned Ralph to his side, with a look of unutterable yearning.

Ralph strode over to the bedside, setting his teeth hard as he did so.

His father's voice was very low and faint. Ralph had to bend forward to catch the words.

"Ralph!" murmured the dying man. "My first-born boy! Ralph!"

"Yes, father."

"I cannot see you. Give me your hand. So—that is it. Ralph, be a father to the little ones, and take my place as well as you can. And, Ralph—"

"Yes, father." This in a voice choked with sobs.

The banker half rose from his recumbent position, and looked hard at his eldest son.

"I see you now, Ralph," he whispered; "and my pretty one, too!"

"Ralph, be kind to her. Kiss me, dear child. Say good-by, Our Roselle."

And with her name on his lips, he passed away.

Max Raff and George Purcell met and met again.

The plot was fixed. Max was to go down and prepare the way.

He packed up his easel and paint-box, and lighted his largest pipe. He was to go down and sketch Lockwood Weir and its neighborhood.

George was to follow on receipt of a letter from his friend.

Beyond this their plan did not extend.

"The chapter of accidents will assuredly help us," Max remarked, philosophically. "Doubt not but that you will see your pretty love again. You shake your head. Nay, then, I will sketch her from memory, if I do not catch sight of her face before you come to me."

"You will write soon, Max," was George's parting remark. "I feel so anxious."

"Trust me, good friend," interrupted Max, gently. "I know well how you feel. You shall have news—good news, before many days are past."

"Thank you, Max!" said George, as he bade him good-by. "Be very careful."

The young artist blew a huge cloud from his pipe, and fanned away the smoke with his felt hat.

"I will be careful—very clever, trust me, George," he said, smilingly.

Then he entered the railway carriage, and smoked contentedly, feeling quite sure, in his own mind, that George would carry his suit to a successful issue.

He reached Lockwood, and took up his abode at the pretty fishing inn sacred to artists and piscatorial enthusiasts.

The place itself was old-fashioned and out of date, but the accommodation was excellent—the cooking superb.

For the first night Max did not stir abroad. So comfortable were his quarters, he became, for the time being, a lotus-eater, and nestled in his snug arm-chair after dinner in epicurean enjoyment.

The bluff landlord looked in, and hoped he was contented; the landlady made up the fire, and was quite ready for a gossip anent local affairs; but Max only smiled and thanked them.

He was one of fortune's favorites, inasmuch as he was welcome wherever he went, and gained golden opinions because he was so light-hearted and sunny-tempered.

Next morning, however, he was in a more communicative mood.

He wished to know the neighborhood, and every tradition of the river. He puzzled mine host by asking all sorts of questions relative to the gentry, and listened eagerly to the prosaic talk of the innkeeper, who was nothing loth to gossip when his guest invited him to drink and smoke.

By and by the talk drifted round to Mr. Aitken and his family.

"He was a good-hearted gentleman, was Mr. Aitken," said the landlord, shaking his head. "Many a good turn he's done me and mine. Got my boy a situation in the city, and made a man of him. He'll be missed, mark my word for that!"

Max stared in astonishment.

"I'm afraid I don't quite comprehend," he said. "Is the gentleman dead?"

"Ah, that he is! And a terrible affair it is, too. Inquest to-morrow. I'm one of the jury, sir."

Then mine host told Max the story, heightening the coloring, and adding many comments as he proceeded.

"And then there's the poor young lady!" concluded the man, feelingly. "Only daughter,

ter, sir, and as beautiful a young girl as you have ever seen. All the parish is proud of Miss Aitken."

"And well the parish may be, my friend," said Max. "I have met her once—only once—and then quite by accident, but I can indorse your statement as to her beauty and amiability."

There was a long pause after this.

The landlord puffed away in solemn silence, and Max thought with bitter pain of George.

"What is to be done?" he murmured to himself. "This is all new and strange to me; there will be no chance of our plan succeeding now."

He walked past the house, and took off his hat as he did so.

The blinds were closely drawn; a mournful stillness reigned around.

The very atmosphere seemed charged with solemn weight.

The brightness and beauty of the pretty suburb, all appeared blurred and indistinct to the imaginative young man.

His heart was full of yearning for his friend.

George must be told the news somehow. Of that there could be no doubt.

Max thought the matter over for the rest of the day; then he took the train back to London, and drove straight to his friend's abode.

George was at home, and in high spirits.

He ran to meet the young artist with outstretched hands.

"Returned, and so soon!" he cried. "Welcome, Max, welcome! You bring me good news, I know?"

Max shook hands, and drew him aside.

"Listen, brave heart!" he said. "I have not succeeded. Our plot has failed. Thank Heaven, it was an innocent one, dear friend! I am powerless to help you, George. Mr. Aitken has met with an accident. He is dead!" George staggered back, as though he had been shot.

"Dead!" he whispered. "Dead! Poor Roselle! Heaven comfort her!"

"Amen!" said Max. "Amen!"

CHAPTER VII.

AN ANXIOUS YEAR.

"ALL animosities should end in the grave." Thus spoke the young artist, as George and he were traveling to Lockwood, to be present at Mr. Aitken's funeral.

The inquest had been duly held, and a sympathizing jury had brought in a verdict of "Accidental death." So that nothing remained to be done but to lay the banker beside his wife in the family vault, and recommence existence without his advice and assistance.

Ralph felt his position very keenly. Suddenly called to take his position as the head of the firm and controller of the family, it was not a matter of wonder that he should have aged wonderfully in a few days.

The family law yer saw it with admiration, and mentioned it to the doctor, with many encomiums on the youth's conduct.

As a matter-of-fact, the business of life necessitated prompt action.

Mr. Aitken was not alone in the great banking house of which he was the head.

The bulk of the capital was his, but he had found it necessary to give clever subordinates a share in the concern.

Not very large, truly; but still sufficient to make his interests theirs.

On these Ralph had ever looked with a jealous eye.

The banker had carefully pointed out to his eldest boy the exact position these men occupied; and so, notwithstanding his father's death, Ralph attended at the bank as regularly and punctually as before.

Even in the few days preceding his father's funeral, he was constantly reminded of his position and responsibilities.

At the bank there was an increased deference in the manner of the employees.

The junior partners consulted him, and asked his opinion on subjects connected with the

business, much as they would have done of his father had Mr. Aitken still occupied the presidential chair.

Ralph knew his importance and influence even in these early days.

Scant chance was there for the success of George Purcell. Roselle, for the future, would be the head of the house, as he would be of the bank; and her destiny was to be shaped as became an heiress.

All animosities were not to be buried in the grave, as Max Raff had hoped.

Even during that troublous time, Ralph's resolve never faltered or changed for a moment.

When the banker confided Roselle to his care, thoughts of George Purcell did certainly float through his mind.

But when the first shock was over, he reasoned with himself, and tried hard to believe the dying man's words could not mean that George Purcell was to become Roselle's husband.

He was thinking of this at the very time Max Raff was speaking to his friend on the subject.

The young artist, with his ardent susceptibilities and enthusiastic mind, could not believe in human nature as being anything different to the kindly thing he had ever found it.

So he spoke to George hopefully and cheerily, and the lover felt all the better for his speech.

The two reached Lockwood late in the evening, and proceeded to the inn, where Max was heartily welcomed.

Under other circumstances George would have been delighted with the quaint beauty of the old place, and the comfort which showed so plainly in the well-ordered establishment.

Mine host and his buxom dame took great interest in Purcell, for he had often been there with Ralph; and the landlady guessed there was something more than met the eye necessary to explain the young man's change of quarters.

They spent a long, quiet evening together, talking of indifferent matters, and studiously avoiding anything like a reference to the object of their visit.

The next morning Mr. Aitken was to be buried. Till that time there was nothing to do but be patient and wait.

So, after an early supper, the two young men retired.

Next morning there was a decorous bustle at the banker's residence.

The sable-draped carriages stood before the door, and the neighborhood looked from beneath the closed blinds, and criticised the black-maned horses and turn-out generally.

Roselle fitted hither and thither, clothed in the deepest crape, looking white and awe-stricken, but very beautiful withal.

Ralph and his brothers were the chief mourners. Then followed the partners, the doctor and family solicitor. Half a dozen private carriages completed the procession.

The day was bright and frosty; the birds were singing from the leafless boughs.

It was just such a day the dead man would have rejoiced in had he been alive.

George and Max walked round the pretty cemetery, talking soberly, as they waited for the party.

The bell was tolling slowly, and here and there a group of people, looking out expectantly, shifted from place to place.

When the procession approached, Max and George hastened to meet it bareheaded.

As Ralph descended from the carriage, his first gaze fell upon George Purcell and Max Raff.

Both the young men bowed deeply. Ralph nodded curtly in return. Around the open grave the same cold, icy look dwelt upon Ralph's features.

Max Raff watched him with a sinking of the heart.

By and by the party broke up. George put his arm through that of his friend.

"What say you now, Max?" he whispered, hoarsely. "That man was once like a brother

to me, his father my truest and best friend; and yet to-day, even in the presence of death, we are as strangers."

"I was wrong, my friend. There are animosities which are not buried in the grave. There is nothing for it but to wait and hope for happier days."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HOUSEHOLD FAIRY.

SIX months, long weary months, had passed away. A great change had crept over Ralph Aitken—a still greater over Roselle.

More gentle than of old, if possible; ever seeking out some new comfort for her brothers, never tired of saying kind words and performing kindly actions—such was Roselle.

Ralph admitted all this, and more. Yet he hardened his nature, and lived with a bitter anger in his heart that at times almost maddened him.

If she had only mentioned George Purcell's name! Had she spoken of him it would have been a relief to him.

But neither to Ralph nor her younger brothers did she ever breathe his name.

Sometimes the lads would wonder why he did not come to the house as usual, and marvel that their old companion and friend had dropped so completely out of their lives.

Once the boys asked Ralph why it was. "They did not understand it," they cried.

Then Ralph had told them distinctly, and with terrible emphasis, that George Purcell's name must not be mentioned; and thus, in a vague sort of manner, the lads felt he had disgraced himself in some mysterious fashion, and were fain to let the subject drop.

But somehow or other, Roselle did not fall in with the new arrangement.

She grew more pale and wan as the days passed on. When the hot weather came she drooped and faded, till Ralph trembled with fear.

One summer's day he took her for a stroll round the neighborhood. The evening was fair and silent.

The odor of honeysuckle floated through the air.

She looked so sad and white, a pang ran to his very heart. He spoke to her in a choking voice.

"Roselle," he said, "what ails you? Have you any pain?"

"No, dear brother, I am well enough; only I feel so weak and languid. Do not question me."

"But I must and will!" returned Ralph, almost angrily. "You are fading away from us, Roselle, and will not confess you are ill. What have I done that I should not be trusted; and by you, too, of all people in the world?"

"Oh, Ralph!" she whispered.

"Do you think I can stand tamely by, and see you sinking into your grave, Roselle? Tell me, dear, have you any sorrow I can share?"

"None, dear brother—none!"

She looked at him wistfully, pleadingly. "Do not think I am indifferent to you all," she said. "You see I am young and inexperienced; and, somehow, Ralph, it all seems so different since poor father died!"

She dropped her fall as she spoke, to hide the tears which stole from her eyes.

Ralph noted the action, and grew more angry than before.

"There is nothing the matter with you, Roselle," he said. "I have your word for it, but I do not think you a fair judge. I will have other advice and assistance. I thought I was to be the head of the family. I find I am not worthy of my position."

"Ralph, you are cruel!" sobbed Roselle.

"I am just!" he retorted. "You were left to me a sacred charge! On my father's death-bed he spoke of you—prayed me to be a parent to you; and I will fulfill the trust to the best of my ability. Roselle, you must rely on me."

"I do, Ralph," she said. "What is it you would have?"

"I would have you bright and healthy, dear! I would have no tears, and sighs, and regrets!"

"You are unreasonable, brother."

"No, I am not. The refrain of that song you are always singing haunts me. It comes to me when I am busily engaged in matters of the greatest import. I cannot get the melody from my memory, though I am often tempted to curse it."

"What song is that, Ralph?—tell me, that I may never sing it again," said Roselle.

"The one song George Purcell sung and loved. Do you know now?"

Roselle caught her breath. She remembered it quite well, but kept silent.

"You remember it, I see," continued Ralph, bitterly. "Oh, for the golden days!"

"Yes, dear—for the golden days when poor papa was with us—when our lives flowed so smoothly and sweetly—when life was one long holiday! Oh, Ralph, for the golden days—"

She leaned heavily on his arm.

He felt the convulsive sobbing which shook her.

He had gone too far, and would have given worlds to recall his words.

Her pretty head reclined on his shoulder. He could feel the quick, spasmodic beating of her heart.

For a few moments thus.

He was angry with himself—hurt almost as much as the fair girl beside him.

"Why have I been so foolish?" he whispered to himself. "I have touched her to the quick, or she would never give way thus."

He looked around, not a soul was in sight.

He raised her fall, and gazed with infinite love and pity on Roselle's tear-stained cheeks.

"Forgive me, Roselle!" he said, in a hurried voice. "I forgot myself. I will never be harsh with you again!"

She held up her white lips to his, and he pressed her to his heart.

"You forgive me, Roselle?"

"Yes, Ralph, if there is any need for forgiveness! But I am such a poor weak girl; and—and not as strong as I ought to be. Don't mind my crying; it does me good."

"I do not think so," said Ralph. "Now, forget every word I have said to you, and try and keep peace with me. The evening has grown chilly, I declare."

The cold was at his heart. He knew this, and suspected Roselle knew it also.

Fast walking would not take the feeling away. Ralph felt this with suppressed anger.

Roselle prattled away, and tried hard to be her brother's old companion, but the attempt was a failure.

They managed to reach home, and Ralph went to his smoking-room to think matters over.

For a couple of hours he smoked on, moody and discontented; then he returned to the drawing-room.

It was, seemingly, untenanted.

His brothers were playing cricket in the meadow. Their shouts were plainly audible through the open windows.

"Happy boys!" soliloquized Ralph. "After all, a boy's life is best, for it is free from care and sorrow."

A moisture dimmed his eyes as he spoke. He tried to do his very best. A hard and uncongenial task, he thought, was his.

According to his light, he had done the best he could. In every other thing he had prospered beyond his wildest hopes. Wealth was his, position and respectability.

Old and well-known friends had flocked round the young banker eagerly. Beauty smiled upon him, and society courted him. And yet he was a very miserable man.

That legacy left him by his father was a weight upon his shoulders, and he could not cast it off.

A burden he loved, too. His sister Roselle was so very dear to him. He had no room in his heart just now for any other thing in the wide world.

He sighed heavily as he turned from the window. All the unspoken thought of his heart was in his face as the sunset struck him with golden gleam, rendering him old and haggard.

He stopped before a portrait. It was that of his mother; a meek-eyed, gentle-looking woman, with thin white hands folded on her knees. Her hazel eyes seemed to look down straight into his, with unutterable love in them.

"Had she but lived," he murmured, "how different things would have been! Our Roselle then—"

He started and shivered, warm though the weather was.

A light sigh startled him. He looked round eagerly. His eyes wandered hither and thither.

On a couch, in the embrasure of the bow window facing the lawn, lay a female form.

He bent over her eagerly. It was Roselle.

Her white dress was spotted with blood; a thin stream ran from her lips.

He knelt beside her, and called her by name. At first softly, then passionately, and with a wailing cry.

She did not move nor speak.

He rushed to the bell, and pulled it fiercely.

"Go for a doctor," he said to the frightened servant. "Get Doctor Sully to come at once. Meanwhile, send Mrs. Richer and one of the maids!"

He took her in his arms, and carried her to her chamber, and laid her on the bed.

Hours went on. The house was hushed and silent. The lads crept to each other's bedsides, and spoke of Roselle in whispers. They could not sleep.

Ralph did not go to bed that night. In the summer's dawn he was closeted with the doctor, who was speaking very seriously.

"I must not disguise the facts of the case, my dear sir!" said Doctor Sully. "Your sister is sinking—sinking rapidly. You must treat me candidly. Is there anything—I don't ask you what—but is there anything on her mind which may account for her illness?"

Ralph hesitated. The keen, clever man of the world had his gray eyes directed full upon his face.

For a few moments he did not answer. Then he said, in a low tone, "I fear there is."

"I thought so," said the doctor. "We medical men are, after all, the only true psychologists. What is it?"

Then Ralph told the story. Not altogether, but in part, and in a somewhat fragmentary manner.

"Now listen to me, sir; and my advice must be followed to the letter, or it will prove useless," said Doctor Sully, quietly. "Your sister may be saved."

"Thank Heaven!" cried Ralph, grasping the doctor's hand.

"Steady, my dear sir—steady! You must hear me out," said Doctor Sully. "Your sister must not remain in England."

"Not remain in England!" echoed Ralph.

"Certainly not. You must arrange for a sea voyage for her—the longer the better."

"But we can go to the seaside; or I will buy a yacht. Surely that will answer the same purpose, doctor?"

"It will not. What your sister requires is rousing. Action is absolutely necessary. In a yacht she would grow even worse than she is now. I have been a yachting man myself in my day, and know of nothing more conducive to dreaming in an idle, listless fashion—the very thing we want to avoid, my dear sir."

"Then you would recommend that she should go a long voyage, doctor?" said Ralph, gnawing his lip.

"Yes; for choice, to Australia. Steamers, now-a-days, are floating palaces. There ought to be no difficulty in the matter. Get a trustworthy companion—send one or two of your brothers with her. There is no more danger in traveling to the Antipodes in these days than journeying to Brighton—in fact, I don't think there is as much."

"I do not like the idea," grumbled Ralph; "we can ill spare her. And then, you see, I cannot go with her myself."

"I have shown you there is no necessity for your doing so," returned Dr. Sully, rather impatiently. "Of one thing be assured—the thing must be done somehow, if your sister's life is to be spared. I have spoken plainly, because I feel strongly in the matter. I assure you, once again, it is your only chance."

He rose as he spoke, and put on his gloves.

Ralph looked at the stern, unbending countenance, and groaned in bitterness of spirit.

For the time being, the doctor was the arbiter of Roselle's destiny. There was no such thing as retreat for Ralph now.

He followed Dr. Sully into the hall, and opened the door himself.

"Remember," said the medical man, "your sister's life is in your hands. Follow my advice, and she will be saved; neglect it, and I will not answer for the consequences."

He shook hands as he spoke, emphasizing his words with great meaning.

"And you think a sea voyage absolutely necessary, doctor?"

"Absolutely. Indeed, I feel so strongly on the subject, that I can recommend no other remedy. Medicine is useless. I should only be robbing you if I took money for it. Make your arrangements at once—the sooner the better. I have done all I can for your sister; the rest remains with you."

Ralph returned to his room, full of anxious thought.

The question was how was it to be accomplished, this long sea voyage?

He was too proud to take counsel of any one. His position in the mercantile world had rendered him indisposed to take advice.

Perhaps Ralph was not altogether fortunate in this.

He was rich, and riches bring great troubles and responsibilities. Moreover, he had the sole charge and care of his brothers and sister. Roselle was his principal trouble.

He sat and smoked, and wondered what would come of it all, and in his heart anathematized George Purcell with great bitterness.

Action was imperative. He had a great tenderness—a yearning love for his sister. He would do anything in the wide world for her, save and except help George to become her husband.

Once or twice he thought of her as George Purcell's wife. And with the thought came again that angry feeling which had hitherto dominated his life.

It seemed so hard to this young favorite of fortune that the one thing he desired most of all in the world should be denied him.

He would fain have kept Roselle as the "household fairy"; but if that was impossible, would have liked her to be clothed in purple and fine linen, and fare sumptuously every day.

If the comfort and elegance of a rich man's home could not make Roselle happy, surely she could not be happy under other and less agreeable conditions.

Ralph threw open the window, and looked out upon the garden.

How beautiful!

The smooth-shaven lawn, studded here and there with clusters of blossom; the river sparkling in the dying sunlight; the trees in the meridian of their beauty. And amid all this his sister was dying.

What beauty could there be in the surroundings apart from Roselle? At all cost, all hazards, she must be studied.

Ralph knew this. Her life was of paramount importance.

He walked slowly up-stairs, and approached his sister's room.

"Roselle!" he called.

"Yes; dear Ralph!" came the answer, in a thin, faint voice.

"May I come in, dear?"

"Yes—oh, yes! I shall be glad to see you!"

Then Ralph entered her room. She looked

so wan and weary, the young man was almost moved to tears.

"I have just seen Doctor Sully," he said, cheerfully; "and he thinks you had better go away."

"Go away!" echoed Roselle. "Why, Ralph, what would become of you all without me?"

"I don't know. We shall be miserably dull and wretched, I dare say, and the house will seem uncomfortable and incomplete; but your health is the most important thing, and so, as dictator, I shall have to banish you to get it back again."

"But how, Ralph? The air here is pure and bright; the scenery such as I love. Ah, Ralph, I shall regain my health more quickly here than anywhere else. I love the old place and its associations; the plashing of the waterfall, the ripple of the river."

She spoke so earnestly, Ralph stared in amazement.

"I like the place well enough myself," he said; "but that has nothing to do with the matter I have to speak to you of. Doctor Sully says you must go away from here."

"Go away?" echoed Roselle.

She turned very white as she spoke.

"Yes; your only chance of restoration to health is a long sea voyage; and you must submit—as we all must—to this decision."

"But supposing I do go, who is to accompany me, Ralph?"

"I cannot go. Ernest I must spare, though he is now getting very useful in the bank. Of course I shall arrange every thing for your comfort; and Mrs. Helston will take care of you."

Roselle smiled faintly. "Dear old Mrs. Helston will be a great comfort to me. And Ernest, poor boy!"

"Oh, Ernest will be as happy as the day is long. He will not object, you may depend upon it. Now, Roselle, consider the matter settled. Can you be ready in a week or so?"

"If as well as I am now," returned Roselle, "I will do as you wish. But Ralph, dear, I do not think it would do me any good. I would rather stay at home, if you don't mind."

"But I do mind," said Ralph; "and shall not hear of your refusing to take the voyage. It is bound to do you good. And, Roselle, we cannot afford to lose you, dear."

He spoke with such tenderness, she laid her head on his shoulder, and burst into tears.

"Come," he said, gently; "you must not give way like that. Be brave, and remember how very important it is that you should keep up."

She smiled brightly through her tears.

"And you really think that voyage would do me good, Ralph?" she said.

"I am quite sure of it," he returned, confidently. "Doctor Sully is not likely to make a mistake in a matter of so much importance. Now, Roselle, you will try to keep up, and carry out his wishes, will you not?"

"Yes," she answered, simply. "Of late I have thought so little of my own life, and—and so much of you and the rest, Ralph, that I fear I have grown over-anxious."

He pressed her hand. "You are a good, true sister," he said. "My father always thought of you as the head of the family—taking a mother's place, young as you were."

"Dear papa!" whispered Roselle. "His memory is so dear to me! I want no other inducement to act as he would have had me act had he been with us still."

"Spoken bravely, and like yourself, dear Roselle," said Ralph. "It shall be my task to make your journey pleasant; and when you return—"

"When I return!" interrupted Roselle, dreamily. "Then I shall love to look at the cedars, and Lockwood and the dear old river, once again. Yes, Ralph; I will go."

Her brother bent over, and kissed her forehead.

"Heaven protect and bring you safely home again!" said Ralph.

"Amen!" said Roselle; "amen!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE GOOD SHIP CLIO.

GEORGE PURCELL and his friend, Max Raff, returned to town that memorable day of the funeral more united than ever.

The young artist was as enthusiastic in his friendship as in his art.

"Be assured, George," he said, "time will prove kind to you. Everything is possible to the man who can wait."

"But it is such weary work, Max," said George.

"True. I remember once traveling a whole day without water on the American desert. Ah, my friend! what dreams I had that day! I could fancy the water trickling down my throat. What an ecstatic feeling it was! Toward sundown we came upon a lake, and then we slaked our thirst. I can never hope for such another delicious draught!"

"I think I see your simile, Max. But what is a day—a single day?"

"An eternity when one is dying for a draught of water, George," returned his friend, gravely. "You will wait for years for your love, perhaps; but, trust me, you will win at last."

At last! Ah! the good time was long in coming.

Six weary months had passed away; not a word, not a line, had George received from Roselle.

Twice or thrice Max had revisited the neighborhood. He could learn but little news respecting the Aitken family, and that was emphatically bad—such, at all events, as he dared not tell to George.

"Miss Aitken was in a sort of consumption," the landlady of the inn informed him. "A sweet pretty dear, too! It was quite wonderful how much she was missed among the poor. But"—and here the good dame shook her head—"she was afraid she was going home."

So Max had no good news for his friend. He had to evade answering his questions, and give him general information, for the most part coined from his own imagination.

George grew sick and faint at heart. He worked with feverish energy, and gained high encomiums from his employers.

Early at morn, late at night, George Purcell was at his desk.

Had it not been for this wholesome medicine of labor, he might have become mad and desperate. As it was, he was noted as a well-doing, steady young man, deserving promotion.

His employers spoke of him thus; they would fain have taken him into partnership, but money was wanted—for times were hard and speculation risky. One transaction with a large Australian firm had turned out disastrously.

The senior partner was wroth with his junior, and the latter retorted with great warmth.

One thing was clear—some one must go out to Australia.

The senior partner hinted it to his junior, who somewhat haughtily declined to take the hint.

The two men spent a day or two in discussing the matter in a cold, formal fashion.

Neither would give way. It was a serious matter, too. Each had the same thought in his mind, yet neither would put it into words.

There was one way out of the dilemma; they had at least one trustworthy employe, and that was George Purcell.

Mr. Hunter, the younger partner, hinted it gruffly to Mr. Baxter.

"You won't go to Melbourne, Mr. Baxter, and I can't. I have others to consider besides myself; you have nobody."

"True," growled the old bachelor. "I am thankful to say you are correct in that."

"Very well; then the question is, who is to go? Somebody must go. Now, there is only one way out of this difficulty—send young Purcell."

"Eh? what say? Send Purcell?"

"Certainly. I would trust him anywhere

under any circumstances. Send him. We have an interest in the Clio. She sails in a few days. Let Purcell take his instructions at once, and get the matter settled."

"I shall be glad for him to do so. The affairs of the Australian firm must be thoroughly looked into, and a new balance sheet made. Purcell is good at that sort of thing, so we may as well decide upon our course at once. What say you—shall we call him in?"

"Yes; I think it will be best," answered the other, shortly.

Then George was summoned, and a long interview resulted in his acceptance of the mission.

After all, if Roselle could not be won at once, he felt quite sure she would wait for him.

And then he was afar off even now. What mattered it that a few thousand miles of salt water divided them? Moreover, he had made an advance in life, and that was something.

It was a delicate business, and only a very confidential man could be intrusted with it.

So George looked forward to his voyage with extreme satisfaction so far as his prospects were concerned. The senior partner gave him his instructions in as few words as possible, and drew a check on his behalf for rather a handsome amount.

So one summer night, when the hot mist hung over the great city like a pall, George Purcell climbed up the ladder by the side of the ship, and clambered aboard.

She was a giant ship, full of all sorts of heavy goods, laden to the very water-line.

All her voyages had been successful for many a year. Her captain was well known as the most careful skipper on the whole line.

He was a keen, clever man, closely shaved, taciturn as regards speech, but a marvelous mariner.

Many a heavy cargo had he brought across the wide ocean, sometimes narrowly escaping its perils. His very name was a sort of guarantee for the security of the voyage.

To ladies particularly he was the embodiment of chivalry. They adored him.

He held a share (a small one, truly),—still a share in the ship he commanded, and that was something. So the prospects of the voyage were very fair indeed. George knew little enough of ships. He felt very safe and secure, and the berth selected for him was comfortable and roomy, comparatively speaking.

They were to sail at daylight. The pilot had been chartered, the captain was in good spirits, the men rather more sober than usual.

The passenger list was a heavy one. Many of the old colonists were returning with boys and girls educated in England, and merchants galore were speeding back again to the new world.

The Clio was a favorite craft, and well known on the other side of the water.

So the passengers felt secure and comfortable.

Many of them knew Captain Wise personally, and very proud they were to call him friend.

So all looked very bright for the voyage, notwithstanding the fog and heat, which were so dreadfully oppressive.

George leaned over the bulwarks, and gazed into the stagnant water.

As he did so, he heard a faint voice, which woke the still small echoes in his heart.

Tremulous and sad, and very weary, it sounded, intermingled with sobs and stifled weepings. He recognized the tones.

With a mad, wild beating at his heart, he listened on.

"Great heavens!" he murmured, "it is Roselle!"

He crept nearer, trembling, almost gasping for breath.

On an ordinary occasion he would have scorned to play the eavesdropper, but to-night he had no command over himself.

Amid the bustle and noise he could yet hear Roselle's plaintive voice.

She was speaking to Ralph.

"Oh," she was saying, "I am so grieved to leave you! I shall think of you and the dear old home so much!"

"Quite right, too," replied Ralph. "Think of home as much as you please. The thought will do you good."

"And I, too, Ralph," put in a fresh, joyous voice. "But I shall be able to enjoy my trip all the same. Oh, won't it be awfully jolly!"

"You have Ernest to take care of you, and Mrs. Helston to comfort you, dear," said Ralph.

"Yes; I am glad of that. Ralph, I have no wish to dishearten you, but I have a presentiment that this journey will not end well."

"Presentiments are folly, Roselle—sheer folly!"

Ralph spoke almost angrily. After all the trouble he had had with it! Now that he was taking leave of his sister, her words went to his heart.

A depressing feeling took possession of him. It was like the atmosphere, dull and oppressive.

"See here, Roselle," he said; "you must get rid of that stupid feeling. I shall look forward to your homeward journey, and shall count the days till you are restored to us. Your welcome will be a royal one, dear."

"Ralph," she whispered, "you are making my heart sink now."

The watcher listened greedily. He heard rather than saw Ralph's parting embrace.

He noted Roselle's weeping eyes, and the dainty handkerchief she waved to the departing boat.

He saw Ernest holding her hand, the while he was shouting, "Hurrah! hurrah!" And the dim and shadowy Mrs. Helston's form was seen through the fog.

Then came the mighty shout of the captain; the exclamations and sobbing adieus of relatives and friends; and, finally the last word, "All ashore!"

"Puff, puff, puff!" went the huge engines. A volume of smoke rose from the chimney into the foggy air, and "Yeo heave ho!" London was left behind; and heigh ho for the land of gold.

Outward bound once again, the good ship Clio cleaved her way through the water. Many sad hearts beat in throbbing bosoms this summer night.

Old friends were parted, never to meet again on earth. Father's and mothers were shambling up the narrow street leading from the docks, their eyes blinded with tears.

On the deck of the vessel little groups were congregated together, condoling and sympathizing with each other, telling anecdotes of home and scenes far away.

The sailors were gloomy and irritable. Each one had left sweet-heart or wife, and pined for the freedom of the shore-life they had left behind.

The captain alone was unchanged.

If he had any regrets, he kept them to himself.

Business was the pleasure of his life; and, in his way, he thoroughly enjoyed it.

This was to be the voyage which was to make him "a man or a mouse."

His owners had hinted this to him, and he was proportionately elated.

He stood on the bridge of the weather-beaten craft, and looked the very embodiment of energy and cool resolve.

Amid her troubles and anxieties, Roselle saw and admired the man. The novelty of her position pleased her, and she strained her eyes to view the vessels as they passed, looming large and black in the darkness.

Thus for a couple of hours. Then a slight rain began to descend, thunder rolled sullenly in the distance, and flashes of lightning pierced the deep fog, and lit up the vessel with a spectral light.

Mrs. Helston had gone to her cabin. Ernest sat beside Roselle, nestling close to her, holding her hand in his.

George Purcell leaned against the bulwarks, within a few feet of them both.

He dared not speak. His heart was yearning toward his love, but he could not bring himself to approach her.

Now and again, as the lightning lit up the scene, he could distinguish her form and that of her brother, seated side by side.

"I hope we shall arrive safely," he heard Roselle say to her brother.

"No fear of that," grumbled the lad. "For my part, I should like a bit of adventure—a shipwreck, or something of that sort. It would be something to talk about when a fellow got home again."

"Yes; if he did get home," said Roselle, with a faint smile. "Fancy, Ernest, being cast on a desert island, and living there for years!"

"Awfully jolly!" cried the incorrigible youth. "A modern edition of 'Robinson Crusoe' would sell tremendously. I could dictate, and you could write, Roselle. Girls are good at scribbling, but they can't describe anything except what they wear, and the fashions, and all that!"

"I would box your ears, Ernest, if I were at home!" said Roselle. "Don't you know some of the best and brightest of our descriptive writers are ladies?"

"I never read any of them myself," retorted Ernest. "There may be clever women about, for anything I know to the contrary."

"Why, Ernest, do you think men have a monopoly of brains?"

"Well, in some things, yes. Look at Ralph, for instance. He is making money fast—at least, so the people say at the bank."

Roselle shuddered as she looked at her young brother's bright, handsome face.

"My dear Ernest," she whispered, "do not speak like that! Oh, my dear boy, money-making should not be the sole object of life. There must be something beyond that—something nobler, grander, more elevating than mere gathering together of wealth."

Ernest laughed.

"Ralph says you are an enthusiast, Roselle; and I believe he is right. Why, what can the business of life be except to gather together money? I give you back your own words, you see."

"Yes, dear. Let me ask you a question."

"Twenty, if you like, Roselle."

"Very well. You were speaking just now of shipwreck and desert islands. Now, supposing, for argument's sake, we really were shipwrecked? Suppose the barren island existed in barren fact, and not in imagination, what good would gold do to us then, Ernest?"

The lad was puzzled; moreover, there was a serious ring in his sister's voice he disliked to hear.

"I am fairly beaten!" he returned, rather sheepishly. "Gold won't grow, Roselle. A sack of wheat would be, indeed, golden grain. A few tubs of water would be more valuable than all the jewels of the crown. I sit corrected."

"No; you do not. But, Ernest, remember what I say. You are young, as I am. But believe me, gold is not the great desideratum of life. The philosopher's stone, dear, is not made of gold."

"Of what is it made, then?" asked Ernest, quizzically.

"Of the humblest metal sometimes, dear. It brings happiness to the poor and lowly. Do you not remember the wise saying of the old sage, 'He is richest who requires least.'"

"Ah, yes! But you are too young to moralize."

"And you too young to listen to my serious talk. It is good to be full of youth and spirit, is it not, dear?"

"Yes, Roselle; so very good. I wish you were as merry and joyous as in the dear old boating days. I never could understand why George Purcell left us as he did. Ralph is bitterly incensed against him. I cannot imagine why; can you?"

"No, dear Ernest." The three words in a choked, sobbing tone.

Roselle bent her head to hide the tears that would come.

"And then he was such a good fellow!" pursued Ernest. "I like him just as well as ever I did. I can't imagine George Purcell doing wrong; can you, Roselle?"

"No, dear; I am sure he has never done any wrong."

"I am glad to hear you say that, Roselle, because girls are rather given to looking at the dark side of the picture. Now, I like the bright side of everything; and I, for one, believe in George Purcell."

"Thank you, Ernest!" The voice came from the darkness. A hand was laid upon the lad's shoulder; another grasped his with a mighty gripe.

Ernest rose, boy-like, and shouted in wild delight.

"Roselle," he cried, "do you see this? Do you hear, sissy? George Purcell is aboard! Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!"

He clasped his sister's hand, and pressed it joyously. It was cold and dead. Roselle had fainted.

The bustle and excitement attendant upon Roselle's fainting had passed away, and Roselle herself was in a happy slumber. Mrs. Helston sat by her side, and watched her with great solicitude.

Ernest and George Purcell sat side by side, chatting in almost an affectionate manner.

Days gone by were recalled; matches were played over again; boating scenes followed each other in quick succession.

So time went on till midnight. The heat was intense, and George and Ernest remained on deck.

Some of the old sailors brought tarpaulins and waterproofs, and covered them over in a rough-and-ready fashion.

Never since he was at the dear old house by the river-side did George feel so happy.

Ernest gave himself up entirely to reminiscence.

"I am so glad to meet you again," he said.

"I never could understand why Ralph and you quarreled."

"We never did quarrel," said George.

"Then why did you not come to our house as usual?"

"My dear boy, I cannot give you the reason. Suffice it to tell you it was not my fault. I have no quarrel with Ralph."

"I am heartily glad to hear it, George. You see, Ralph is the head of the house. My poor father thought all the world of him, and could he have managed it anyhow, he would have come out with Roselle. He is awfully fond of her you know?"

"I am not surprised at that," said George, in a low, tender voice.

"Well, no. You see, we are all fond of our Roselle. She is so young, and yet so sensible. You would hardly believe how good she is. The home is not home without her."

"I would believe any good of her, Ernest. Oh, you don't know how much I think of her; how dearly—"

George stopped short, and Ernest raised himself on his elbow. He stared at George with wide-open eyes.

"Why, you don't mean to say you are fond of her like that?" gasped the lad.

George did not answer. Ernest took his hand.

"Come, old fellow, speak up like a man! I am not my brother Ralph, you know."

"Oh, Ernest, I have kept my secret so long, so sacredly! It is such a relief to unburden my heart! I have no right to speak thus; but I love her, laddie—I love her with all my heart and soul!"

His voice was tremulous and broken. Tears were in his voice, tears in his eyes.

He turned away from his old companion, for he was ashamed of his emotion.

"Don't turn away, George," said Ernest, kindly. "I have sometimes thought that I

would rather have you for a brother than any one else in the world; but that was long ago, when Ralph and you were like brothers. As for Roselle—"

"Ah, Roselle!" murmured George.

"Yes," continued the young fellow, in a grave voice; "you see, she is the principal person concerned. As far as I am concerned, I wish you success. But it rests with Roselle. If she really cares for you—"

"I think she does," whispered George, huskily.

"Then count me on your side. Ralph or no Ralph, brother or no brother, I'll help you both as far as I can!"

"Thanks, dear boy!—a thousand, thousand thanks! And now for a move. Do you know, Ernest, I don't like the look of the night. The atmosphere is so oppressive."

"A sure sign of a storm," said Ernest, gleefully. "I have read of storms, but have never been in one. 'What fun it will be!'"

A weather-beaten sailor passed them as Ernest spoke. He stopped short. Curiously he peered down into the speaker's face.

"You have never been in a storm, have you, young sir?" he asked.

"Never. I have come to sea for the first time. But I have read of storms and tempests, and have no fear of them."

The man took off his hat almost reverently.

"The wind and the waves are beyond our control," he said, softly. "A mightier power than ours ordains whether the passage is to be a smooth or a rough one."

He passed on, and the two friends looked at each other.

"What does he mean?" whispered Ernest.

"George, are we likely to come to grief, think you?"

George laughed softly and happily.

"We have an angel on board," he said.

"She will be our protection."

The lad smiled. Young as he was, he knew love's language. He rose and held out his hand, a smile mantling his countenance meanwhile.

"You mean our Roselle."

"Yes," Purcell returned softly. "Our Roselle. Good-night, dear Ernest—good-night!"

"Good-night, George!"

The lad rose as he spoke, and strolled toward the ladder leading below.

George remained on deck. He was too restless to sleep.

He had no fear of the storm. The lightning ran along the water, and showed all manner of brilliant colors as it glanced from wave to wave.

They had reached the Nore by this. The river had merged into the sea, and the water was choppy and rough.

Now and again the voice of the captain was heard, issuing orders in a commanding manner.

The pilot stood beside him, speaking now and again in a low tone. He was about to leave the vessel in the steam-tug which had towed the good ship thus far.

George Purcell was preternaturally wakeful this night.

He could not sleep. The excitement of his position kept him awake.

Roselle was on board. This thought dominated his whole being; he felt like a guardian of his dear one.

They had been so long separated, it was like the old time when he was always with her, now that she was divided from him only by a few frail planks of timber.

He recalled in memory all the pretty words and witching ways of his darling, and yearned in his heart to be near her.

"Roselle!" This was the burden of his song, the refrain which rung again and again in his ears.

He sung it as he lay there thinking of her under the tarpaulin, and like a lullaby it hushed him to sleep.

The mist had cleared by this time. Now and again the moon floated from the fleecy

clouds surrounding her, and lit up the seascape with a wild, weird charm.

Once or twice he opened his eyes in a dreamy, semi-conscious manner, and listened to the rippling of the water as it dashed against the bows of the vessel.

Then came the deep sleep of exhaustion. The night had grown cold, but George was oblivious to it.

He was dreaming of Lockwood Weir, and gathering forget-me-nots for Roselle; he was talking to her tenderly and gently, watching the color come and go on her pretty cheeks. All the love of his heart was concentrated on his darling. "Roselle, dear Roselle!" he murmured, in his happy slumber.

The rough old salt who had spoken to him and Ernest looked down upon him with a sigh. He had youth, strength, energy, this young fellow whose face was upward turned to the dark and lowering sky.

He was meditating thus, with a little envious feeling at his heart, when a cry, loud and angry, disturbed his reverie. He ran to the forepart of the vessel; the steersman was gaping and rubbing his eyes.

"What is the matter?" he cried.

The man at the wheel looked at him sleepily.

"Ay? What say? Not a point off her course, I'll swear."

Tom Prideman looked ahead, and shuddered.

Looming in the distance was a huge steamer coming along at its utmost speed.

"Ahead, there!" roared the captain. "Starboard the helm! Quick! hard down! Ahoy, ahoy, ahoy!"

He rushed down from the bridge, and tore madly to the wheel.

He was too late.

One turn of the screw and the brave old vessel might have been saved. But she was doomed. A crashing, grinding sound smote on his ears as he took the spokes of the wheel in his muscular hand.

The steamer had veered round, but had missed her distance, and crashed clean into the side of the ship.

Then followed a scene of indescribable confusion.

The boats were lowered, but most of them sunk immediately. The captain roared out orders which no one thought of obeying or even listening to.

The steamer swayed to and fro, every movement of the vessel causing deeper destruction to the good ship Clio.

The captain dashed the moisture from his eyes and brow, and ran to the side of the vessel.

Men were crowding over, leaping into the water, clutching at the ropes thrown to them by the crew of the steamer—mad, utterly mad. The instinct of self-preservation was so strong upon them, that great stalwart men pushed aside women and little children like autumn leaves in their wild endeavors to escape with life.

The Clio rocked to and fro, groaning as though she had been a human being in her last agony.

The water rushed into her, ton after ton. Gradually she sunk lower and lower.

The captain of the steamer screamed himself hoarse, and shook his hand to his comrade on board the sinking ship.

He stood erect and calm. Every boat had been tried, and found wanting. Half a score of men had leaped from the Clio to the steamer, scarcely one reaching his destination.

And, worst of all, the captain of the homeward bound vessel feared to go too near to the Clio.

His only chance of saving life was to keep away, for the waves ran high, and every touch of the steamer opened wider the gap through which the sea was rushing.

George Purcell was one of the first to render assistance. When the first boat was launched, he it was who assisted in lowering it. When it capsized, he was the first to spring into the water, and try to right it.

In the mad excitement of the moment he forgot even Roselle. The life-saving instinct incident to brave men had taken complete possession of all his faculties. He was here, there, and everywhere.

The captain noted his fearless mien and brave conduct, and smiled through the mist which had gathered in his eyes.

"Bravo, youngster!" he cried. "Bravo, bravo!"

The ship was sinking then—sinking fast. The women congregated at the gangways.

The captain leaped down, and took the young fellow aside.

"I don't know your name, sir. I haven't an idea who and what you are, but you are a brave man. My lad, we must save the women somehow. The ship is sinking."

He gasped out the sentences quickly. George grasped his hand.

"We will save them!" he cried. "Stand aside there!" This to a group of sullen-faced men looking anxiously toward the steamer.

"George!" cried a weak, sobbing voice—"my love, George!"

He ran over to the women, and looked anxiously around.

Roselle was clinging to Ernest.

"Where is George?" she wailed.

"Here!" cried George—"here, Roselle! I am by your side; trust to me! If you can be saved, I will save you! If we are to die, we will die together!"

She threw herself into his arms.

"George," she said, "they tell me the ship is sinking. Oh! what shall we do?"

"Trust in Providence, dear!" He spoke in a hoarse tone. "Roselle, if mortal man can save you—if prayers can help you—"

He broke off, and sprang over the side. Roselle shrieked, and covered her face.

"Hurrah, hurrah!" roared Ernest. "Bravely done—oh, well done, George!"

"What is it?" whispered Roselle.

"He has clambered aboard the steamer. Now he is at the side. He has life-buoys and ropes, and waves his hand. Saved, Roselle—saved!"

"And now, dear Ernest?"

"He is on the bulwarks, preparing for a spring. He is over! Did you not hear the splash? He is coming toward us, a rope in his mouth. Hold up, dear; if you faint now, all is lost!"

"I will not faint. Brave heart, dear George!"

He was battling with the waves. Once or twice he seemed almost on a level with them.

Sinking now and then almost out of sight, anon rising and breasting the crested waves, slowly and painfully George worked his way toward the sinking vessel.

The remaining passengers watched him with absorbing interest.

Near as they were to a watery grave, the heroism of the gallant young fellow touched them to the heart.

A faint, very faint cheer greeted him as he appeared at the ship's side.

The billows tossed him hither and thither, buffeting him, and playing with him in a sportive, cruel fashion.

The skipper stood with his arms folded, looking down upon the scene. Even as he stood and watched, the Clio was settling down.

Lower and lower sunk the ship. Men's hearts grew sick and faint with fear; women were praying, and clasping little children to their breasts, comforting them in sobbing whispers.

George was speaking. The movement of his lips could be distinctly seen, though no sound of human voice could be heard.

In mad excitement, Roselle bent over to catch the words.

"What does he say? Ernest, what does he say?" she cried.

The boy was watching the swimmer earnestly.

"Hold a moment, Roselle; I cannot hear. Ah, now I have it! Overboard!—overboard!"

"It is death!" sobbed Roselle—"it is death!"

"It is life!" said a quiet voice. The captain spoke. "If your life is worth preserving—if you have those dear to you longing for your return—clamber over the bulwarks—jump into the water; that young man will save you!"

"But Ernest!—he is my brother, sir!—what is to become of him?"

"Hush! Be brave, and you shall see! He shall follow your example, or I will myself pitch him overboard. See, now I speak the truth. In the presence of death I can't lie."

"One gripe of the hand, Roselle. So, brave girl! Now, dear—one two, three, over! Hurrah! hurrah!" cried Ernest. "See now, captain, he catches her! He swims bravely; he reaches the side; they are hauling her up! Saved! saved! Thank Heaven! Hurrah! hurrah!"

The captain's eyes grew moist.

"Brother?" he said.

"Sweetheart, sir," returned Ernest. "I am her brother."

"Heaven bless sweethearts and wives!" said the captain, in a strangely quiet tone. "Follow your sister's example, my lad, when the time comes, and give that young fellow my last blessing."

He shook the lad's hand as he spoke, and hurried away.

Presently, a sailor darted from the steamer like an arrow. He sprang upon the water, breasting the waves like a swan.

Over and over he turned like a porpoise. But his resolution never flagged for a moment. He was bound for the Clio, and evidently meant to accomplish his task.

Ernest could see the man had fair hair and blue, laughing eyes. Thrice he was dashed to the ship's side, and as often washed away again.

Ropes were thrown out to him, but he failed to grasp them.

He leaped from the water, and tried his hardest, but all was of no avail.

He glanced up at Ernest imploringly. The captain noted the look, and touched Ernest on the shoulder.

"Now, my lad," he said. "I promised your sister you should have a chance for your life. You have one—one only. That fellow is the best swimmer I ever saw. He has come for you. Moments are precious now; minutes we can't reckon on. Over with you!"

"One moment, captain. Heaven bless you! A thousand thanks! If we meet again—"

"It will be beyond the river, lad. Good-by! I must stick to my ship while a couple of planks hold together. Now, then—overboard!"

He grasped the boy's hand, and literally lifted him on to the bulwarks.

Ernest sprang into the water readily enough. As he did so, shrieks and groans on every side saluted his ear.

The good ship Clio broke up like a match-box, and in a moment hundreds of ghastly faces peered into his own, and scores of arms attempted to drag him down into the fathomless deep.

He gave himself up for lost. As he rose the second time, the cries of the drowning men, the screams of children, were horrible to hear.

Bewildered and frightened, the boy struck out wildly, shouting lustily for help meanwhile.

The waves covered him once again. Then a strong arm dragged him forward and dashed aside the water with furious force.

Ernest fainted. When he recovered, he was safe and snug in a hammock by the side of the man who had saved him.

"Well, youngster," said the bronzed sailor, holding out his hand as he spoke, "how do you feel now—eh?"

Ernest recognized him in a moment.

"Where am I?" he queried. "Ah, I remember now. Where is my sister and George Purcell?"

"Well, I reckon they are fast asleep. As to where you are, my lad, you are by the side of

Jem Honeybloom, aboard the Narcissus, from Australia East, homeward bound to old England."

"And the Clio, sir?"

"Under the wave, my lad, with two hundred passengers and all her crew. Your pretty sister and her sweetheart are both safe aboard, and with this wind we shall, I hope, be in dock in a few hours."

"I feel sleepy and tired, Mr. Honeybloom," said Ernest.

"Mister Honeybloom, young master! I don't like the name at all. When you wake up again, call me Jem. Now, go to sleep, and dream you are all taut and safe with your mammy."

The lad sighed, and fell into a deep slumber.

When he woke again, the vessel was off Gravesend, and the passengers all preparing to leave and go ashore.

He hurried upon deck. Amid the bustle and excitement, it was somewhat difficult to see what was going on.

Presently he espied Roselle and George, sitting side by side.

He approached them, and held out his hand.

"So we are all saved, dear sister!" he said.

"Yes, dear; thanks to George, here, and that brave sailor who took his place. Oh, my dear, how happy we ought to be!"

"And so we are," quoth George earnestly; "very happy indeed. Are we not, Roselle?"

"Yes, dear. I was never so happy in all my life before."

At this reply, Ernest walked away, for he saw his company was not required. For a couple of hours, until the day dawned raw and gray, he walked the deck.

Then the welcome land came into sight, and a few hours more saw them safely on shore once again.

Ralph Aitken sat in the counting-house of the bank, thinking deeply.

He missed Roselle more than he cared to acknowledge even to himself. "The household fairy" was wanting to his home, and he began to feel disquieted and restless.

A calm review of the past did not help him. He was almost sorry now the old days had changed.

In imagination he was back again in the youthful period of his existence.

From that, in imagination he wandered on through youth to early manhood.

In every scene George was present. More than a brother had George Purcell been to Ralph; and, after all, he was a good fellow.

This was his unspoken thought. George Purcell was a good fellow, and perhaps it was a pity he had not been more friendly with him. Roselle might have been with them still, instead of being on the trackless deep.

He bent low his head, and groaned in spirit.

Wealth was flowing into the family coffers; but happiness was leaking out of the family home.

His meditations were disturbed abruptly. One of the partners came in, a telegram in his hand.

He sat down, unbidden, and touched the young man on the shoulder.

"Mr. Aitken," he said, gently, "I have something to say to you."

"Don't bother me if it is not very important, my dear sir. I am not well to-day," murmured Ralph, irritably.

"But it is important," said the fair-looking, smooth-faced man. "It is so important that the owners of the Clio have thought it necessary to telegraph to the firm, and—"

"What?" interrupted Ralph, hoarsely—"what of the Clio? Speak, man! Do not tremble like that! What of the Clio?"

"She has gone down, sir, only a few hours out, with every soul on board. Don't give way, sir! For goodness sake, don't do that!"

For Ralph had fallen back in his chair, and was sobbing ready to break his heart.

An hour passed away. Ralph was speeding

to London as fast as a special train could carry him. He chartered a cab from the station, and hastened to Fenchurch street.

Arrived at the owners of the ship, he burst into the office, trembling and sobbing with agitation.

"What is it, sir?" asked a gentlemanly clerk. "You are agitated—ill! What can we do for you?"

"The Clio?"

"Lost, sir, I regret to say. Very sad business indeed," returned the speaker, shaking his head, sorrowfully. The best skipper on the line, too, that is the worst of it."

"And the passengers?" gasped Ralph. "My sister—my brother?"

"Are here!" said Ernest.

"Ernest!" cried Ralph, amazed.

"Here!" said the lad.

"And Roselle? Oh, Ernest! our dear one?"

"Here, too, thanks to George Purcell. No, Ralph; before you touch my hand shake that of our preserver, George Purcell."

Ralph held out a weak and trembling hand. With the other he covered his eyes, for he was breaking down fast.

The gentlemanly clerk had left the office, so the family group were alone.

"Come hither, Ralph," said George, in a kindly, gentle voice. "Roselle is waiting for you."

Ralph clasped her in his arms. For a few moments she sobbed on his shoulder. Then he whispered to her, and a smile gradually overspread her features.

"I am so happy, Ralph!" she whispered. "Poor Mrs. Helston is lost! I ought not to feel happy, ought I, dear?"

"Yes, dear Roselle. I hope for the future your life will be one long holiday. And now let us speak to George."

"Brother," said Ralph, "forgive me!"

"Forgive you? Oh, Ralph! you have called me by the name I love and covet most. From henceforth let us be as brothers, as we were in the good old days. Dear old Ralph!"

"Dear George, thanks a thousand times! You have a claim upon me now that I shall never be able to repay."

"Yes, you will," broke in Ernest, in his bright, boyish voice. "Now, sissy, what are you crying for, eh? Ralph, you can cancel the debt we all owe him; shall I tell you how?"

"Yes, Ernest; tell me! How can I do it?"

"Give him our Roselle. He loves her, and—"

"She loves him," interrupted Ralph. "Ernest, I have been a sad bungler and a bad fellow. You are right. He has saved her life. Well, she shall give it to him if she pleases. She will always be as dear to us, after all."

Roselle put her hand over his mouth.

"Let us get home," she whispered. "Ralph, dear brother, how can I thank you?"

"By getting well, dear, soon, and bringing sunshine once again to the dear old home. Now, all of you, come."

In the late autumn Max Raff made a sketch of a happy party; the scene, the lawn of The Cedars; the characters, George Purcell and his wife, taking a last look at the River by Lockwood, preparatory to starting on their wedding tour.

"How well and happy she looks, Ernest!" said Ralph.

"I think I will fall in love, Ralph," said the youngster. "It is a panacea for all the ills that flesh is heir to."

"It has made our sister a happy woman," said Ralph. "I would dear old dad had lived to see the day we gained a brother and gave away our dear Roselle!"

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